I don't smoke.

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/58969780.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Rape/Non-Con
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Dead Plate (RachelDrawsThis Video Game)
Relationship:	Vincent "Vince" Charbonneau/Rody Lamoree
Characters:	Vincent "Vince" Charbonneau, Rody Lamoree, Marianne "Manon" Vacher
Additional Tags:	Obsessive Behavior, Period-Typical Homophobia, Internalized Homophobia, Non-Consensual Somnophilia, Non-Consensual Drug Use, Bottom Rody Lamoree, Extremely Dubious Consent, Forced Orgasm, Dom/sub Undertones, Anal Sex, Lovesickness, Alternate Universe - Different First Meeting, Feelings Realization, Top Vincent Charbonneau, Unhealthy Relationships
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2024-09-15 Completed: 2024-10-14 Words: 41,612 Chapters: 3/3

I don't smoke.

by frenchguycooks

Summary

He didn't mean to fall so hard.

Or

There's this new guy at school. Vincent doesn't know how to deal with him.

Notes

I apologize in advance if there are any mistakes, English is not my first language. I tried my best.

- The story is still set in the 60s, except that Vincent and Rody meet in their early 20s.

Chapter 1

Being a part of Paul La Pierre's establishment was one of Vincent's greatest achievements. This was his last year at the most prestigious culinary school in France. He silenced everyone, especially those who thought he couldn't do it. His parents. Some of his acquaintances. Vincent would prove to them all the success he was sure to achieve. If Vincent was one of the best - if not the best - in his school today, it wasn't for nothing. Vincent followed three values in the kitchen: discipline, precision and excellence. He damned those who didn't follow these principles. Those who had everything to concoct the best dishes without realizing how lucky they were. A chance that Vincent had lost, and why he had surprised so many when he announced that he wanted to be a chef.

The loss of taste. That alone.

Vincent found it quite ironic that one of the chef's most precious senses no longer existed in him. Despite his inability, he would do anything to make his dream come true. To open his own restaurant that would be acclaimed and loved by the masses. But for now, until that day comes...

"Get back to work! Hurry up!"

"Yes, Chef!" Vincent shouted along with his comrades.

Amidst the steaming pots and pans, the smell of spices and smoke flooding the large kitchen, a group of about fifteen students were busy cooking. It was only the second day back at school, and they were all working hard. Vincent chopped shallots with speed, twirling the knife between his fingers with practiced ease. Making Rossini beef tenderloin required his utmost attention. Vincent knew exactly how much spice to use and when not to overdo it, lest the finest buds be disgusted. He prepared his sauces with millimeter precision. Not a drop more, not a drop less. The perfect amount, just right.

The chef Limousin walked behind him and nodded his approval, inhaling the delicious smells rising from the pot.

"Well done Charbonneau, you never disappoint compared to Martin," he praised. Martin, a few feet away from them, lowered his head in shame.

"Thank you, Chef."

This kind of praise from his chef didn't please Vincent as much anymore, he had gotten used to it, but he exuded a certain pride in his work, because despite his disability, he was better than everyone else in his class. It was an undeniable truth that set him apart from the rest.

While some might look at him with greed because he had won the boss's approval, they would never understand the tremendous amount of hard work Vincent had put in so far. All

those nights studying, experimenting, never really knowing if what he was doing was right. He could only wait in fear to see how someone would react to tasting his dishes, with a lump in his stomach he struggled to get rid of.

"Five minutes left!" the chef announced.

Panic crept into a few faces as many ran around in a hurry, some disregarding the cooking time or even the intensity of the fire on which they placed their sauces. A kitchen was always noisy, whether it was the clatter of utensils or the sound of water boiling on the fire, but never as loud as when they had to hurry.

Meanwhile, Vincent calmly placed his beef fillet in the middle of a plate, garnished it with thin slices of black truffles and duck liver. He poured a thick brown sauce over the tender meat.

He wished he could taste it. Just to be sure. Maybe it tasted *terrible*-

"Stop! Put the dishes down and step away from your plates, hands behind your back!"

Not a single utensil moved. They all lined up in a row, facing the large counter in the kitchen, where each plate was laid out in front of them. Four-eyed Martin was sweating so much next to Vincent. Vincent would be lying if he said he wasn't a bit nervous himself, when chef Limousin took a taste, his words could potentially destroy a future career. Vincent hoped he'd get the chef's recommendation before the year ended, knowing it would open many doors. But the chef walked past the dishes. He didn't come any closer. He looked at them all, one by one, his gaze sinking into his chef's hat. Then he smiled, his wrinkles deepening.

No good could come of this.

"If I've asked you to prepare this well-known dish today, it's so that you can set an example for our new recruits, who will be responsible for tasting for me."

Vincent was annoyed and almost twisted his lips, but refrained. Whatever. His plate wouldn't be a dead one. More people entered the kitchen. Six, Vincent counted. They all looked serious, in pressed white work clothes, their faces closed. Except for one. One who stood out from the rest by the color of his flaming hair. A redhead. A rare sight. Vincent couldn't remember seeing one for a long time. Or was it really red hair? This guy looked more ginger than brunette. Why was he smiling so much? A big goofy grin at that.

"Welcome to Paul La Pierre. Your seniors will be your teachers for the rest of the year. I'll let you introduce yourselves."

Everyone knew how it would end. Vincent would handle everything. No one would protest. When the newcomers opened their mouths to say their first names, Vincent didn't listen, except for this tall, dumb-looking one.

“Rody Lamoree!” In a voice louder than the others before him. A kitchen was rarely silent. But this guy was loud.

Maybe it's the hair, it's so distracting , was what Vincent told himself as he realized he was staring at him too much.

“Newbies, get to your forks. Say what you think of your elders' dish. Choose the dish that inspires you."

Without a doubt, Vincent's plate was the most beautiful, every drop on the porcelain carefully placed. It exuded a special elegance, a unique, spicy fragrance where others had remained classic. He wasn't surprised to see some of the newcomers eyeing it and taking a bite, savoring with delight the explosion of flavors Vincent's expert hands had conjured up, bathing him in compliments to which he paid no attention. Instead, Vincent focused on someone else, too surprised to see the redhead looking doubtfully at Vincent's dish. Rody chose to ignore him, instead taking a bite of Martin's dish on the other side. A gesture that caused Vincent to turn livid.

“Delicious!” Rody complimented.

Martin relaxed his posture, a tiny smile on his lips. Vincent couldn't see his gaze through the steamy glasses – how stupid it was to cook while wearing glasses, Vincent didn't dare – but if this guy could have jumped for joy to the ceiling, he would have. According to Vincent, not all cuisines were created equal. But his...was better. Or, he tried to think so.

Delicious. That was the word Vincent deserved to hear. Even if it was very simple, even if the words weren't as good as those of a food critic or the great Chef Limousin.

Vincent already hated this Rody's lack of taste.

It was his first impression. His first mistake. Just to look at him.

*

Vincent thought he would never see that Rody again. But as seniors, they had to set an example. At least that was what the chefs thought. Vincent was very unlucky to run into this redhead a few days later. Again. Every week they had to face a new challenge in their dishes. They would revisit certain classics, add their own original touch, and serve it up. Small groups of four would be formed within the class. The seniors would take on a few freshmen to help them out, and several kitchens were made available to them. This reinforced teamwork and the seniors' responsibility as cooks. Well, apparently.

“I can't believe we allow this kind of guy into our school,” his classmate Louis said, looking absolutely flabbergasted. And rightly so, for Vincent was certain that he'd never seen a worse, more incompetent cook than Rody.

"Hey, how do you turn off this fire?" Rody asked, close to the hot plates that were tripling in volume.

What the hell was that? Vincent was speechless. The entrance exam to this school was extremely hard, and some students failed several times before they could get in. The culinary field required knowledge, awareness, and open-mindedness. And at least knowing how to boil water.

Certainly not what Rody was doing.

"Oh, I think it's burning!" Rody panicked, repeatedly turning the various knobs on the stove. Vincent rushed to his side to close them. Rody looked relieved when he turned to him and smiled.

"You think this is all a joke?" Vincent asked, his gaze cold as he met that grin with full, pink lips. Stupid lips.

"What? No!"

"If you can't even boil water without almost burning down the kitchen, you really don't belong here."

Vincent's harsh words floated through the air, he could feel the stares of the other two students behind them. Rody's face lost its smile. Thank God for that. Vincent had to concentrate. He didn't need any distractions in his kitchen. He took this very seriously. This was all he had left.

"Sorry, Vince," Rody muttered. Vincent's ear twitched at the nickname. The guy was way too easygoing. He'd probably heard his first name once and was indulging in this informal mannerism.

"What did you call me?"

Rody seemed to realize. Vincent nearly facepalm. What an idiot.

"That's chef for you," Vincent instructed. That was how respect for superiors was enforced.

“Got it, chef!”

Why did Rody sound so cheerful? Vincent didn't want to know the answer. He sighed. He was tired and it was only the morning.

"Move. I'll help you."

That was what a good senior did. Vincent missed Louis' even more stunned look behind him.

“Really?!” Rody exclaimed.

“Yeah, I don't want to get in trouble because I didn't stop some idiot freshman from setting the building on fire.” He started to clean up the water that had overflowed onto the plates with a rag. The kitchen needed to be put in order.

Vincent truly believed his reason, and not because the defeated puppy dog look had disappeared from Rody's face replaced by that unbearable grin. It didn't matter anyway. As long as Vincent did his job well and got that recommendation at the end of the year, he'd be happy. One day he would be a great chef, recognized all over the world. This was just a step in his life. Rody was a tiny stone in his path. Vincent could step over it.

“Oh, what if I press here-” A loud thud interrupted Rody, startling Vincent from his thoughts.

God. Rody would grow into a huge rock if he kept this up. Vincent turned and saw the microwave, open, covered in eggs inside.

“Holy shit! Don't touch anything Rody! Vincent, you tell him!” Louis shouted, horrified at seeing the state of the equipment. Rody's classmate, named Tom, continued to follow the revisited boiled egg recipe on his own, very quietly.

"I just wanted to heat up the eggs-" Vincent threw the rag in Rody's face. He felt irritated, but less than he usually would. If he could finish his task as quickly as possible, it would help both of them and give him some comfort.

“Clean up, then follow me. Hurry.” His tone left no room for protest.

At least Rody was obedient. He cleaned the inside of the microwave while Vincent arranged the various eggs in a bowl. A short time later, Rody was standing next to Vincent, following closely behind. So fast and efficient that Vincent forced himself to take a look after Rody's cleaning. The microwave's inside sparkled, not a single piece of dirt remained. Quite astonishing.

Maybe this guy Rody wouldn't be such a problem, as long as Vincent kept an eye on him. Which he did.

"You will follow what I tell you very carefully."

"Yes, Chef!"

Rody couldn't do much without his help, Vincent realized. Even boil an egg.

"You do it like this. Cautiously, otherwise you'll get air in it and it'll leak and burst."

Vincent advised, and the slight smile Rody gave him didn't bother him so much in the end. As long as the redhead listened, everything would be fine.

"Good. Just like that...you increase the flavor."

Rody managed the frying pan in a base of oil, keeping the egg white heated exactly as Vincent wanted. Meanwhile, Vincent prepared the beets.

"Look! I did it!" Rody sounded proud as he pointed to the egg pancake on a plate.

"Good job. You make me three more like this one."

"What? Isn't that enough?"

"No. We'll twist them without breaking the substance."

This was a job that required meticulous attention to detail, not the kind of work Vincent would entrust to Rody. At least not anytime soon.Seeing the extremely focused look on the boy's face next to him, the tip of his tongue stuck out in an obvious sign of concentration. Vincent could only think, *no, it wasn't that bad.*

"Vince, it burned..."

Vincent held back a sigh, snapping out of the daydream he hadn't even been aware of. This usually never happened. He saw the burnt egg on Rody's frying pan. He'd been wrong. A vein of irritation crept up Vincent's forehead.

"Then do it again and it's Vincent. Not Vince."

*

The peace and quiet of a bookstore. One hobby that had never left him in his deep hours of solitude had to be reading. It contrasted with the kitchen. Here everything was quiet. When he had the time, he could pass the hours browsing the books, looking for a rare gem or a classic to add to his own library.In the dim light, Vincent flipped through a book between a couple of shelves, reading the first few lines of the novel to see if it would suit him for tonight.

"I like this book too. Victor Hugo." A soft voice spoke to him. Vincent lifted his nose from the pages. A young girl with light brown hair adorned with a hairband had just approached, her eyes welcoming. Always well dressed, she followed the fashion of the young women of her time by wearing long, puffy dresses. Vincent didn't know her very well, but she was friendly.

She'd been coming here for a month. Vincent almost sighed. At first he'd tried to ignore her, because Vincent wasn't one for small talk, but every time he did, she spoke to him, and since then their relationship had become quite cordial.

"Notre Dame de Paris, interesting choice. What a man you are, what an intellectual," she said dreamily.

Except for the times when she flirted with him, and if she didn't at first, she hid less and less in the last few days. Vincent didn't have time to think about romance in general, his dream of becoming a professional chef came first.

"If you like this book so much, there are many others by the same author. Ask a bookseller," he replied and went back to reading. She giggled.

If Vincent was honest, he didn't hate her. They'd had good conversations on books. She liked Baudelaire too.

"But what if I need your help?" Again.

This time Vincent closed the book.

"What's wrong with you, Manon?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're being unusually stubborn today."

She said nothing more, leaning against a shelf, her eyes staring into space as she touched the locket around her neck.

"It's just that... I'm sorry, I'm not feeling very well. I lost someone close to me recently. I mean, they're not dead, but we had to move on with our lives, separately."

A break up. Vincent stopped himself from rolling his eyes. Why did he have to pick up the remains of a shattered heart? How ridiculous. He wouldn't be the band-aid of a broken relationship. He was about to tell her to drop the whole thing, that it wasn't worth disturbing Vincent's peace, but then she spoke.

"I fear he'll do something bad, such as commit suicide. But I remember that he never gives up. He always tries his best."

If he let her open up, would she leave him alone?

"I had to tell him that I appreciate men who cook well, knowing that he has no talent and would even burn cereal. Pretty impressive." She sounded fond of her ex-boyfriend.Vincent had time to waste over the weekend.

"So he won't leave you alone? What a shame." Some men were really pushy. She'd been unlucky; she'd fallen for a weirdo. Vincent hoped it would never happen to him. It would really ruin his plans for the future.

Manon clutched her own arm, looking as if she wanted to look away after exposing herself to Vincent. But somehow she'd got through to him, even if he'd never admit it out loud. What she described sounded like... love. A feeling Vincent had always been missing.

"Sorry, let's talk about something else. Something positive."

Vincent didn't feel like talking, he just wanted to buy his book, he was getting ready to leave, ready to turn on his heel with a quick goodbye.

"Are you a cook? I saw you looking at the new recipes in the culinary section. My parents are food critics, so if you need any advice..."

Was she that desperate? In any case, Vincent didn't hear the rest of what she said. If these parents really were critics, she wasn't that useless in his life. It would be a good idea to invite her to dinner sometime. But not today, he didn't need to. Just keeping in touch was enough.

*

Classes on wine were the worst in Vincent's opinion. The kind of experience that always reminded him of what he'd lost and, ironically, left him with the illusion of a sour taste in his mouth instead of wine. The only thing that proved he'd been drinking was the dizziness he felt after he'd had too much. Otherwise, he had every right not to attend that class. Missed lessons, but essential for a great chef. Vincent allowed himself to try the wine in the cellar. Alone. He knew perfectly well that no matter how much he drank, it would all taste the same. In those moments, when he saw all those wines carefully arranged on the shelves, a rage threatened to overflow. He threatened to smash everything. He was depressed when faced with the red rim of his glass. He felt repulsed. Here was a private, secret time, when despicable thoughts formed in his own head. To the reason for the loss of his taste, to this trauma-

Then, the door opened wide, causing the light in the room to flicker. Vincent almost dropped his glass. It was late afternoon, some students were still staying in the establishment, but it never happened that someone barged into the storeroom at this hour.

“Hi, Vince! What are you doing here?” Only one person dared to call him that.

Vincent gritted his teeth. He should be the one to ask Rody this exact question.

“Don't you have something else to do? Like going home?”

“I was just...curious.” Rody replied, rubbing the back of his head.

“About what?”

"We had a class about wines, I just wanted to note down the ones I didn't know."

In this wine cellar, there were over a hundred, if not more bottles scattered everywhere.

Hell, even Vincent couldn't remember everything. He didn't comment any further when Rody looked at the labels naming the various bottles. At least he wasn't touching anything. Then Vincent noticed an obvious detail. Rody had nothing to write with.

"Weren't you supposed to be taking notes?"

"I am." Rody tapped his temple. "In my head."

Vincent arched an eyebrow, incredulous. How was it possible that this guy could remember all those titles if he couldn't remember how to call Vincent properly?

"As if you could remember..." Vincent rolled his eyes and crossed his arms.

"I can! I swear I can. I know more than you think."

"Impress me, Rody."

Vincent couldn't remember having so much nerve as a freshman; back then he'd skimmed the walls and bowed his head in respect. But Rody was different. He pointed to a bottle.

"This is from the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, famous for its Pinot Noir reds from hundred-year-old vines, which makes it the most prestigious wine. This one has been aged since 1830. This one comes from Bordeaux, it was a favourite of King Louis the 16th, its production has dropped sharply since his death, oh and this one..." Rody babbled, Vincent's eyes widening at the encyclopaedic flood of knowledge Rody threatened to drown him in.

The boy wasn't kidding. Vincent even learned facts that he didn't know. Which meant one thing: he had to learn.

"And this—”

"Stop it, you're not going to explain everything to me either. I don't have all night," Vincent cut him off, annoyed.

Now he was even further intrigued. Culture and knowledge were valued even in different subjects. Was it possible that this idiot in front of him had scored high enough to get in without knowing how to cook? The perfect score? Vincent didn't ask; he'd already figured it out. He drank again, his back turned.

"Are you allowed to drink here without the chef?" Rody asked, coming closer.

"Mind your own business. The chef won't believe you anyway."

He could sense the young man right behind him. Then the redhead moved to his side so he could see him, as if he didn't want Vincent's eyes to escape him.

"Why won't they believe me? It's not like I'm going to tell them, it's our little secret," Rody smiled playfully. So stupid. That guy was so... stupid. *Our little secret.*

Vincent ignored his trembling heart.

"I've lost my ability to taste. I can't taste anything."

"Oh."

Oh, that was the right word, because he had nothing to say about it. So Rody had to get out of the way before Vincent's anger boiled over, exploded.

"Does that mean you don't have any favourite food?" Rody asked. Vincent put his glass down on the table, almost breaking it.

"No."

"What if you really had to choose?"

Rody was talkative. More than normal people. But oddly enough, that didn't bother Vincent too much.

"Well... lemons."

"Lemon cake? Lemon pie?"

Lemons, so sour that it managed to wake up Vincent's dead tongue a little.

"Just lemons."

Rody was deep in thought, as if trying to think of something else to say to disturb him.

"What about you?" Vincent asked.

He didn't like to make conversation. He really didn't. Guess what, Rody was less irritating than the others.

"Whatever my girlfriend eats!" Rody replied proudly.

"That's not a real answer."

Did it even make sense? Such a devoted but non-responsive answer. In a way, it was endearing. Vincent couldn't believe that he used the word "endearing" when talking about Rody. The guy was a weirdo.

"Well, that explains it," Rody remarked.

"What?"

"Why you look so uptight when you cook. The cooking looks miserable."

At this point, Rody could bother him. A streak of irritation crossed Vincent's brow.

"What?!" He snorted, offended.

"Huh? No, nothing! I mean..."

Rody searched for words.

"You're cooking like a scientist with your little vials."

"Rody, you should shut up. You don't know anything about cooking."

Rody started to fidget with his fingers.

"I can help you if you want!"

Vincent didn't need any help from this... this fraud of a cook. He could help himself. But self-doubt was suddenly all-consuming. This feeling was always crackling inside Vincent, slowly eating him up, every day in this school, making him feel insecure.

"What then? I'm curious to know what a guy who puts an egg in the microwave can teach me." There was some mockery in Vincent's voice.

"Of course, I don't know how to make a real meal."

Obviously.

"But I could find the secret ingredient to make your dishes better!"

"How are they not better?" Now Vincent was curious why Rody had chosen Martin's dish over his own.

"Too perfect, artificial... Your dishes look like they're straight out of a magazine and they look unreal. It's a strange feeling I can't explain."

That was the honesty that hit Vincent in the gut.

"So that's why you came to this school? To become an assistant?"

Rody smiled poorly. Closer, his eyes were very green, quite limpid. What an indecent sight it was for Vincent to see every detail of the iris.

"No, I want to become one because my girlfriend prefers cooks."

What a coincidence. It reminded Vincent of Manon's story. But it just couldn't be.

"Maybe she'll give me another chance to get her back, I wasn't trying hard enough in the relationship. I'll try harder."

Just a coincidence, Vincent repeated over and over in his head. Couples breaking up happened every day.

"So you want to help me?" Vincent repeated. He would not accept his proposal out of kindness. The fool was educated.

Besides, Rody was an optimist, the kind who saw the glass as half full. Vincent saw the glass half empty. On the other hand, he had the ability to taste, which Vincent didn't. This could work.

"I'd be happy to! You'd be my teacher too, I could learn to cook, it's win-win. Please, Vince!"

Dog eyes. Seriously, this man.

What the hell had Vincent gotten himself into again?

"Okay. But if you screw up–"

Two strong arms went around him to hug him, Vincent's head resting on Rody's shoulder. He was too shocked to react right away. He could feel Rody's head buried in his neck. All the warmth of a body pressed through the shirt against Vincent's cold skin. The boy's hair tickled him. For a few seconds Vincent couldn't breathe.

Too much. Too much.

His whole brain was on alert from a mere hug. Vincent had never felt so invaded in his life. What the hell was happening? When Rody released him, he was still smiling, as if nothing had happened, as if he hadn't just turned a part of Vincent's calm world upside down.

"Sorry. I got too excited. I'm really happy!"

Vincent wanted to bang his head against the wall instead of punching Rody.

"Don't ever do that again."

Vincent's heart was beating too fast. Rody rubbed the back of his head.

"Sorry."

Such an absolute idiot.

*

Working with Rody wasn't as bad as Vincent had imagined. Apart from the rather invasive questions Rody asked him, everything went smoothly. They were in different years, so they took time out after class or in between classes to explore new things.For the first time in a long time, Vincent was having fun in the kitchen.

"I swear, if you don't put the flour back on the table, Rody..."

"But it's so fluffy!"

He couldn't stop his own lips from curling into a semblance of a smile at the sight of this man-child.

"Those strawberries look so pretty." Rody ranted about simple things.

"Yeah, so don't eat them. They're for the cake, and it's a simple recipe, so you'll keep up."

"Okay Chef!"

They prepared the dough, and once it was in the pan, he let it rest in the oven. Vincent had already washed the strawberries. All he had to do was cut them, then he'd make the topping and—

"Ouch!" Rody dropped the knife on the table, then held his hand, his fingers full of blood. The red of the blood mixed with the red of the strawberries on the wooden cutting board. It was disgusting. Unhygienic. Vincent should throw the strawberries away right now.

He stared at the crimson liquid coming out of Rody's bruised pink flesh. Calling him. Hypnotizing him. So tempting.

"Sorry, I screwed up–"

Vincent pushed Rody hard to shut him up, and the redhead nearly fell over, looking at the other young man in confusion – almost fear. Vincent had to understand what was happening deep down. This hunger that was awakening in him, this fear of himself, somewhere.

"I'll clean up, put your hands underwater and let them dry. Wait for me here."

Vincent went to look in the last closet. There were bandages and plasters and gloves, just in case. An accident always happened quickly in the kitchen. He returned to Rody, who had done what he'd been told. He looked down at the floor, his eyes avoiding Vincent's for the first time.

"Let me see that," Vincent said calmly.

He bandaged Rody's hands, his eyes lingering on the blue veins beneath the golden skin, tracing them without limit. Since he could only admire, Vincent hurried to finish by putting on gloves. Hygiene in the kitchen remained strict. Then he took the strawberries and put them in a small bag. He would throw them away later. He picked up a new knife, rinsed the old one, and set it next to the cutting board. There he took out some new strawberries and began to rinse them in the sink before placing them in a bowl.

"I did something bad..." Rody's voice was low. It wasn't like him to sound so defeated.

Vincent had been too harsh.

"It's all right, Rody. Let me show you how it's done. Come here."

It took Rody more seconds than usual to move, but Vincent ignored that. Instead, he chose to stand behind the young man as he came face to face with the bowl and the wooden plank. Even though Rody was tall, Vincent towered over him by a few centimeters, so he could see better. He took Rody's hands to guide them, forcing him to pick up the knife and grab a strawberry. Vincent felt like a puppeteer. Except that his puppet was slightly tense, pressed against him. Jumpy, even. He could feel him shiver.

"Be a good student," Vincent said, close to his ear. He couldn't hear Rody breathe. He was strangely quiet, the redhead nodded.

"We cut like this." Vincent guided the blade to slice the strawberry into several pieces before grabbing another, repeating the same gesture each time. Now, from here, they were closer. Vincent could even smell the perfume that wafted around Rody even stronger. A scent that made his mouth water. He couldn't say exactly what it was, but now Rody smelled like, almost like ...

"Is that enough?" Rody asked. His voice wavered a little at first, pulling Vincent out of his trance. He looked and saw that there was only one strawberry left.

"Yes."

As they parted, he noticed that Rody's ears were flushed lightly. He looked at Vincent from the corner of his eye.

"We'll make a topping then."

"Can we add vanilla seeds? I like them a lot." Rody's suggestion wasn't... silly at all.

"And some red fruit jelly that I'll crush," Vincent added, feeling inspired. Which was a while ago. The cogs in his brain were starting to work.

This time, Rody seemed to have regained his optimistic spirit. He smiled. The kitchen was getting too warm. Even for Vincent. Maybe he'd caught a fever?

"I need a break, I'm going for a smoke. Keep an eye on the oven and if you do it right, you'll get the cake."

"Really? You mean it, Vince?"

"Yes."

Vincent came out of the kitchen through the emergency exit, a bag wrapped in his apron, and without Rody noticing, his nose was already against the oven window. Outside it was a simple alley, but it led to a part of the large campus garden. It was convenient for all the kitchens to have the garbage cans out back. Less tiring, too. Vincent held the bag of bloody strawberries over the garbage can, then stopped the gesture, frozen. What was in the bag was calling to him, imploring him. Vincent felt like he was losing his mind.

It would be a waste.

That was his only thought as he opened it and grabbed a bloody piece to stuff in his mouth. And Vincent could almost... almost taste it. His whole body burned.

*

After a few days, Vincent had to come up with an idea. Quickly. Even if it was a lie.

"We can't use the school kitchens after school any longer."

"Why not?" Rody sounded disappointed.

"The janitor complained."

They talked a lot between lunch breaks now. Rody was always looking for Vincent to eat lunch with him. Even though Vincent preferred to eat alone, Rody distracted him and managed to find him; he seemed to have discovered the place where the young brunet spent his break. When he'd first found him, Vincent had wondered if Rody had followed him, but he hadn't dwelt on the thought. Now they were sitting in a rather secluded spot on the school grounds, on the tables provided for the purpose.

"So where are we going?" Rody asked.

Vincent wanted them to spend more time together. Like good casual acquaintances. Rody appeared to be more refreshing than most people Vincent knew. The others seemed fake. Right in front of him was a young man with no evil motives and the most expressive face he'd ever seen.

This janitor thing was convenient.

"My house."

He had everything he needed. There was no lack of equipment in Vincent's house.

"Thank goodness it's not my place. My apartment is really small, it's a student's room, you know." Rody seemed genuinely relieved.

Vincent took a small bite of his tomato and mozzarella bread, trying to swallow his disgust. When he ate, he tried to absorb all the nutrients his body needed to function. Smoothies were usually enough, but inconsistent. Being taller made him look sicklier and slender, which made Vincent quite thin compared to Rody. Rody, who, bathed in sunlight, had more protruding muscles under his shirt. Hard to contain if the young man stood up and decided to immobilize him. Vincent was not sure if he could fight back or if he was just angry. Really angry. But he wouldn't tempt the devil.

"Did you hear me, Vince?" Rody waved a hand to draw him in.

Bigger, damaged hands. Vincent's fingers were thinner and his hands looked more delicate despite the burns from the hot oil. They weren't perfect, but they were elegant and dexterous. Not rough and clumsy.

"Yes, I can tell you're poor. You're lucky they don't just take the rich here, but skill is more valuable." Considering Rody's clothes are not of good quality, his checkered shirts from the local market.

"So you think I'm skilled? That's the first time I've heard you compliment me."

Vincent stopped eating.

"I didn't say anything."

"Yes, you did."

"No, I didn't."

"You did!" Rody laughed with that special chuckle, he seemed pleased, his eyes full of sparkle. As if Vincent's compliment pleased him more than anything else. What a face. Vincent was afraid to think about it tonight.

Whatever.

"Let me finish my meal, then I'll come back to you."

“Can I take a bite?”

Vincent had noticed that when Rody came to eat with him, Vincent was practically the only one who ate. Or sometimes Rody would take something from the school kitchen when he thought Vincent wouldn't notice.

"Go ahead, only because I feel sorry for you." He held out his bread across the table, Rody bent down to take a bite, opened his mouth so Vincent could catch a glimpse of that rosy bit of tongue. Vivid. That beautiful tongue. Vincent felt warm all over. He felt even warmer when he saw Rody close his eyes and chew, holding his rosy cheeks. Vincent wouldn't admit it out loud, but he loved seeing those expressions on the young man's face.

"Delicious! Even the way you make sandwiches has changed!"

Really? Vincent hadn't noticed.

"What do you mean?"

It was a simple sandwich. A plain sandwich. Not very nutritious, if Vincent was honest.

"I can taste the love in it. A bit strange."

Vincent's face lost color. Rody sometimes – often – spoke a language Vincent didn't comprehend. Full of emotions, feelings. But love? Vincent had never thought about that.

Love.

Love.

Love.

"You can have it all, Rody." Vincent handed him his sandwich.

"Really?!"

"Yes."

What a strange feeling at first, but the more Vincent watched Rody talking to him and eating what he'd made, the more familiar the feeling began to become.

*

If Vincent could be patient with Rody as a senior, he was far less so with others. That's what this school sometimes did. It exacerbated certain nasty traits, and they came out at the worst possible time. There was a certain hierarchy, the chefs were at the top, then there were the seniors, and in the middle, nobody knew, but at the bottom were the juniors. Vincent was even worse than the other seniors. He was a vulture. He took cooking very personally. So some people probably hated it when it was his turn to manage the first-year kitchens. That was another assessment from the chefs.

"Are you really fucking serious about your dish?"

Vincent hated these assholes who had no respect for anything, who had all their fucking senses but couldn't manage not to put too much salt or pepper on a dish. He despised them.

The guy in front of him was shaking, his eyes down. Thomas, or who knew? Vincent couldn't remember his name. He only saw the damage to the dish. A mistake that might seem small, but was important. One extra minute of temperature was enough to ruin everything. Unable to make a salt-crusted turbot, the Limousin chef's speciality and one that Vincent had learnt to master. It was the lack of effort and dedication of others that caused Vincent to go berserk.

"I'm sorry..."

"You think sorry is enough? You want to poison the others? You want me to become a fucking failure like you?!" Vincent shouted.

"No, Chef!"

The vein in his forehead popped out. He was so pissed off. And this boy had to learn his lesson. Vincent grabbed his arm and put his hand in front of the cleaver, the blade threatening and shining, ready to fall on his fingers with one false move.

"I didn't hear that." Vincent was ready, merciless.

"No, chef, I'm sorry!"

Vincent pulled hard on his collar, forcing him back in front of the stove.

"Now you do it again. Until you succeed. Even if you die from it. Understand?"

"Yes, Chef!"

Then Vincent left him, walking away from the source of his wrath. He needed a smoke to loosen up before he came back to smash the bastard's skull against his frying pan; he would choke him to death with some fish bones.

He saw the other juniors looking at him fearfully as they avoided him in the kitchen. Vincent liked to be respected, he didn't deny it. Now he was ready to take the pack of cigarettes out of his trousers and get out of there. He raised an eyebrow when he saw that the emergency door had closed quickly. He hurried to open it again, curious. Only to see Rody, ready to climb over the alley fence.

"What are you doing here?" Vincent asked softly. Finally, a soothing sight.

Rody gasped, then turned to act as usual.

“I...I was just going into the kitchen.” There was no lack of kitchens in this place, but trying to snoop around the biggest one in rush hour. Rody had some nerve.

“Why?” Vincent asked, pulling out a cigarette and then his fire to light it.

“Because I was hungry.”

Vincent nearly choked on a smoke as he laughed. How unintentionally funny Rody was.

“Are you serious? I wondered why you were snatching food. Are you that hungry every hour of the day to allow yourself to do that? What would the chefs say?”

“I know it's not right but I don't have much food at home...You won't tell anyone, right?”

What a pity.

“Hm...I don't know,” Vincent replied. He went on smoking. Rody walked up to him, arms swinging.

“Please, I didn't say anything about the wine.”

“You can tell them, I told you they'd laugh in your face.” Vincent was just messing with Rody's head and the young man was unable to figure it out right away.

“Come on Vince, we're friends.”

Friends. Him and Rody? The term didn't satisfy Vincent, oddly enough. Not at all. He decided to drag out the joke.

“Maybe if you beg me nicely, I'll think about it–”

Vincent was interrupted by the sound of two knees slamming into the floor, Rody's hands cuffed together in front of him. Too stunned to speak, Vincent's heart missed a beat. *Was this boy even thinking?*

"Please, Vince! Don't say anything to anyone!"

Vincent held his cigarette with two fingers, threatening to fall and crash into the young man's face. Rody's cheeks were red with embarrassment. A truly charming sight for Vincent, who barely breathed without realising it. Rody was very close. Right up to his waist. If Vincent took two steps, he'd have his crotch right in Rody's face. It would be obscene. But Rody had no shame.

"What the hell! Get up, stop embarrassing yourself in front of me! Shit, I was only kidding, Rody!" Vincent urged him on, his cheeks threatening to blush. Now he wanted to finish his whole pack of cigarettes to relieve the stress. Because Rody had this effect on him that made Vincent's whole stomach crackle.

"Really? Sorry!" Rody grinned as he stood up. "I knew you wouldn't do that to me."

"Why kneel then?"

"Just in case."

Damn.

"Idiot."

He couldn't figure this guy out, but Vincent didn't care. Nice to have someone different. Rody was unique in his own way.

"You know, you shouldn't smoke, Vince. It's bad for your health."

Here they went again.

"You do realise that most people who work in restaurants smoke, and that we deal with smoke in the kitchen all the time?"

"I know. But I want you to live long, at least a hundred years."

Vincent wasn't even sure he'd live to be thirty, so a centenarian? Rody was hopeful.

“I also told my last girlfriend, she loves smoking so much... I'm afraid she'll die from it one day.”

Yes. Rody had a girlfriend. A woman. Which Vincent wasn't. He had a dangling limb between his legs. To hear him talk about someone else, especially a woman, made Vincent turn bitter. He looked down at his cigarette.

“Sure, I'll listen to you.”

“Really?” Rody's expectant eyes on Vincent. Vincent gave a little smile.

“No.”

Or at least, not right now. The last few days had been nerve-wracking.

*

"Your house is so big compared to mine!" Rody marveled as he walked through the front door. Vincent had been surprised by Rody's age during a conversation one day, he'd learned that the redhead was three years older than Vincent, but Vincent felt like the older one. Rody was such a child. He ran around the living room, staring curiously at the furniture. Shit, had he never seen a couch before or was he so poor that he couldn't afford one?

"Don't break anything."

"I won't!"

It was better to come here after school. It left a kind of privacy they missed at school. He and Rody in one house.

"Do you like red, Vince?"

"Not particularly."

But red was the most pleasing color to the eye. That was why it stood out in his apartment. It had appeal.

"You have a record player!" Rody gushed as he touched it with his fingertips. Vincent almost sighed.

"You don't?"

"Not so good...it doesn't work anymore."

Vincent didn't need his that much. He liked to listen to music when he had the occasion. An interest for quiet and sometimes energetic sounds, full of passion. He thought silly that Rody was interested in the simple record player when his cello was shining next to it.

"I'll get the kitchen ready. Stay there." Vincent told him.

He'd recently bought some new ingredients. Some egg white powder for a change. He plugged in some machines to make them work until the electricity reached them, and Vincent came back into the living room to find it empty.

Where had Rody gone? Had he left? Had he run away because he couldn't stand Vincent?

Before he panicked, Vincent went back down the long hallway to his house. He looked into the bathroom. No one in there. The guest room. Empty. The last room, his bedroom, with the door half open, he noticed. He pushed.

Rody was bent over a picture. He made no attempt to hide it.

"What are you doing here?"

Vincent was irritated. He'd told him to stay back there.

"I wanted to go to the bathroom."

"Why didn't you think to look at the first door?" Vincent questioned him logically. He'd forgotten that he was dealing with Rody.

"Which door?"

Vincent didn't even try to puzzle it out; he walked over to the young man standing behind his bed.

"What are you looking at?"

"Sorry, this picture caught my attention. It's you in it with long hair. Why did you cut it?"

His cousin had taken the photo just before he started school. He ran his hand down the back of his neck, remembering the tragic loss of his hair. He'd cut it that very night when one of the chefs had decided to bully him about his haircut on the second day.He'd forgotten to put the photo in his album.

"It's inconvenient for a cook to have long hair."

"How so? You can tie it up, can't you?"

Vincent didn't answer. It was an unpleasant memory. Too humiliating.

"Besides, you look like a pretty girl in the picture. You could have tricked me back then," Rody joked.

Vincent froze. Did Rody just call him pretty? Not just a pretty girl. He'd hinted that he might have been interested in Vincent. That Rody might have found him attractive. But Vincent was no girl, his chest was too flat, his body lacked soft feminine curves, his voice was too deep, deeper than Rody's. There was nothing inherently wrong with being a girl, the reality was different. No delusions about who he was.

He took a step forward. He needed Rody to see that he was a man, too.

"Do I look like a girl to you?" Vincent asked in a low voice. Rody was still looking at the photo and raised his head to see that Vincent's face was close to his own. Even though the room was dark, Vincent could see Rody's colorful cheeks thanks to the moonlight and streetlamps that shone through the window glass.

"No...no, not at all." Rody's voice sounded choked. He avoided his gaze.

So *delectable* .

Vincent decided to step back, not to let his thoughts wander too far.

“Well, let's get out of here. We're here to make new recipes that we'll demonstrate. I'll revolutionize the culinary world.”

“Yes! Let's go!” Rody echoed back. They headed for the kitchen.

The great thing about Rody was that he put his heart and soul into everything, just like Vincent. It was rare, extremely rare, to find someone who matched his energy. He found it in Rody. They spent hours testing new recipes. Half the night, in fact. Vincent was glad that tomorrow was the weekend. He found it restful and it wouldn’t bother him the next day. He didn't sleep much, but he suspected that Rody probably did.

“Vince, I think you did it!”

Vincent was breathing hard, his forehead beading with sweat. He felt like he'd run a marathon as he took turns getting ingredients, stirring, and rushing to cover the fire. Cooking had never

been as exhausting, as fun, as addictive as it was with Rody.

“The mousse liquefies in your mouth, it becomes creamy ! It's incredible!”

Yes. Vincent could be proud.

"We need to perfect it, it'll take a few days. Let's take a break." He took off his apron and sat down on a stool. Rody looked out of the kitchen window; Vincent called his name.

"You can go home now, I don't want to keep you here, you've done enough."

"There's no need. Besides, I have a problem with my apartment."

"What do you mean?"

Rody scratched the back of his head. A sign of discomfort. Vincent had gotten to know them all.

"The sink is completely blown out, the bathtub is smashed. So my apartment is... kind of flooded?"

The hell? Vincent pinched his eyebrows in irritation; he found this more than a little reckless on Rody's part.

"Why didn't you call a plumber?"

"It's so expensive. I tried to fix it myself, but it got worse afterwards. I swear, in a few days I'll have the money to have it fixed-"

"You can stay." Vincent interrupted, "But you clean up, I don't want my apartment overrun with fleas."

It was a cliché, too cheesy for Vincent to say without making him cringe, but at that very moment, Rody literally had stars in his eyes, so bright that they were glowing, enough to make Vincent dissolve inside himself.

Holy crap.

*

That's how Rody stayed at Vincent's for a few days, bringing back little of his belongings. And Vincent couldn't say he was living a nightmare.

“Vince, you have a phone! Why don't I have your number?”

“You have it now.”

Or.

"Vince, you listen to rock music? I never thought you would! Can I listen with you?”

Or.

“Vince, I love that cherry pie you made. The tastiest.” Vincent loved this compliment from Rody more than anything. Living together extended their nights of cooking.

Thanks to Rody's help, Vincent could now present his new recipe to the Chef Limousin. This famous, unique creamy mousse transformed into a liquid. Sweet, creamy, smooth. Vincent insisted on seeing Limousin. Five days later, he showed up at his office at the end of the day, holding a dish under a bell. He'd been so anxious to get home and tell Rody all about it - after he'd bathed and eaten some sort of meal. In fact, late that evening, sitting on the couch at home, Vincent mused.

“He said it was the best mousse he'd ever tasted in his entire career, that I had surpassed his expectations even though I already had his high recommendation, and that if I need anything regarding a future restaurant to give him a call. He really trusts me.” Vincent was thrilled. His dedication had been recognized.

"Amazing! I knew you could do it!" Rody smiled so much that Vincent wondered if he was sore.

"I hope I continue to be innovative."

Rody would continue to lend him his tongue. It would be so much easier.

"Of course you will!"

Rody was very supportive. Vincent liked that. They spent the rest of the evening relaxing. It wasn't too late yet.

"Vince, there's a movie I want to show you afterwards. I hope you don't get scared easily," Rody said and grabbed the remote.

"Look who's talking."

"I'm a big, brave boy."

"We'll see."

Vincent let him put on his movie. A movie about a vampire man who terrorized an entire neighborhood. The black and white colors made certain scenes uncertain, between another liquid and blood. That's why Vincent preferred real life.Color television was a long way off.

The movie went on. Vincent was rather bored by the events as they unfolded, the main characters yelling too much and the sound effects making his ears ring. Then he felt Rody's whole body shaking next to him. Rody was chewing on his fingertips.

Before Vincent could say anything, the young man was clinging to him.

Fantastic . Vincent loved horror movies now. Every time he heard a crashing sound, he felt Rody's heartbeat quicken. At certain moments, Rody would close his eyes, only to open them again. Which made Vincent wonder why Rody had chosen to watch this movie in the first place. But Vincent wasn't complaining. He enjoyed Rody's touch against him.

The movie ended too soon in his humble opinion.

"Shit... I don't think I'll make it tonight." Rody sounded genuinely scared. But no vampire would catch him tonight to suck his blood or eat him. That was unrealistic.

"What's wrong with you, big brave boy?" Vincent teased him. Rody sulked.

"I'm serious, Vince."

Good.

"I have a sleeping pill if you can't sleep. I'll give it to you."

"Yes, please."

Vincent got up to get the box of pills from his nightstand, then took a glass of water back to Rody. He took out a pill.

"It's a little strong, so you should take half..." Vincent's voice faded as Rody took it all at once without listening to him.

"Huh?"

Vincent sighed and crossed his arms.

"Nothing. Go to sleep, Rody."

"Good night, Vince!"

Rody spun out into the hallway, and Vincent thought he could see the crack of Rody's buttocks as his pajama pants fell so low on his hips.

Rody was a real case in his own way.

Since Vincent didn't want to go to sleep yet, he preferred to read a few pages of the novel he had taken from the library last time. With so much going on in the last few weeks, he hadn't even had time to read.

As he settled down on the couch, boredom began to take hold of him within a few minutes.

His mind started to race. The fact that Rody was asleep at home brought him to a level of excitement he hadn't experienced in a long time. The young man had been an exemplary guest over the past few days. Especially since Vincent hadn't found any fleas.

Vincent walked down the hallway, ready to go to his bedroom, then stopped at the guest room.

He might as well see if Rody was resting well, considering how freaked out the boy had been earlier. Vincent's hand pressed the doorknob. He narrowed his eyes to get used to the darkness, but the good thing about Rody was that he hadn't closed the curtains to go to sleep. A light snore drew Vincent's attention to the bed. Quietly, he closed the door behind him and approached the bed. And Vincent's breath came in a feverish rush. Rody's face showed peace as he slept on his back with his mouth slightly open. His clothes were rather loose. Vincent could only imagine what was underneath.

"Rody?" Vincent called him. The other didn't react, didn't lift a finger, he was deeply asleep. Vincent touched the other's arm to arouse him. No reaction.

Rody wouldn't wake up. He was so vulnerable. It was all his fault. Vincent had told him to take half the pill.

He wanted to leave. He felt himself acting strangely, not like his usual self in front of Rody. A dark desire crept through him, growing as his eyes wandered.

It would be the most rational decision to leave. A small voice in his head whispered the opposite. As if he wanted to get a taste of Rody. Vincent was human, he had needs, and he could take care of himself, now that those needs were redirected to Rody, he'd break the guy one day if he kept this up.

"–anon..." Rody muttered in his sleep, his head moving.

Vincent's ear strained. He hadn't heard right, but Rody had just said a name, or at least it sounded like a name. Frustration rose in Vincent. He didn't ignore the reason for his dismay. Why was Rody so difficult?

Vincent sat down on the edge of the bed. He took a closer look at Rody. His fingers went under the edge of his shirt.

"You're not even looking at me, you're thinking about someone else."

His hand moved up the fabric. Vincent gasped at the sight of tanned flesh, full of moles – Vincent expected it, Rody had two visible on his face. Two pink buds stood out shyly. The sight was mesmerizing.

Rody's pecs were well defined and Vincent felt he had to take them in his hands and fill his palms. He positioned himself better on the bed, his trembling fingers caressing the sleeping redhead. He liked Rody's muscular body. He worked hard for it. Because he wanted to please. To please someone who wasn't Vincent.

Women liked strong men.

But now it was Vincent who enjoyed it. His fingers pinched one of Rody's nipples, twisted it, and was rewarded with a sigh that sent a shiver down Vincent's spine. He could feel his arousal in his pants. It had been a long time since he'd had anything so entertaining. Without a second thought, Vincent leaned over and cupped a nipple with his mouth.

" *Nngh- ahhh* ," Rody moaned. Loudly. It surprised Vincent so much that he stopped, afraid he'd woken him up. He knew it would be bad if Rody woke up, for both of them. He found out that he hadn't. Rody was still asleep, his red neck rising to color his face. That calmed him.

Vincent's mouth took the nipple again, sucking hard to get a rise out of Rody. It was not to be missed. The young man squirmed in his sleep, panting. Vincent's tongue circled and then slowly moved to the other to take it between his lips.

Damn. He loved this. There was no taste, but the sight of Rody panting beneath him, because of him, drove Vincent crazy. Rody's scent reached his nose. Acidic. Floral.

He should have done it before, before Rody left, because Rody wasn't going to stay in this house forever.

"Ohh," Rody was so expressive in his sleep that his eyebrows furrowed for a few seconds before returning to normal.

Vincent continued to suck on the nipples for what seemed like hours. He couldn't taste anything, but Rody's whimpers fed him. They were delicious. Vincent's mind rambled while his eyes feasted. He could do whatever he wanted. One of Vincent's legs went between Rody's and suddenly his thigh touched something hard. Vincent looked down and smiled.

"You wanted this, didn't you?" Vincent's hand came to rest on the bulge. He rubbed through Rody's pajama pants. Vincent could feel it getting bigger, harder and harder against his palm.

Rody's breathing quickened, his eyelids trembled. Vincent hurried to pull down Rody's pants. It would be better if his comrade didn't wake up with his underwear splashed all over.

Vincent spat into his hand before holding him tight. Rody felt thick in his hand.

"Big boy all over, ah," Vincent laughed as he panted. Without realizing it, his own hard-on rubbed against Rody's thigh. Vincent's hand started slowly, wanting to feel every vein of that cock against his bare skin. The spit made it slide as smoothly as possible, but Vincent was pleased to see that the tip of Rody's shaft was wet to make it easier. Vincent's lower stomach

boiled, tingling him to the core. He pressed his lips against Rody's cheek. It felt warm. He was so hot. Vincent could feel himself burning with just the touch. He loved him.

"Come into my hand," Vincent whispered so low, too far gone. His palm quickened on Rody's cock.

" *Ah, ah, mmhn,* " Rody gasped, unable to hold back his moans. So open to Vincent, letting him see everything. Vincent would come too. Especially if Rody kept wiggling against him like that–

Oh. Oh.

Vincent lifted his head, his mouth catching Rody's, stifling their moans as he felt the pleasure wash over him, bursting through him like fireworks. Rody's hips shook. Vincent's palm was painted white, jets spurting onto Rody's belly. A big load.

Vincent leaned back against the young sleeper, exhausted, out of breath. He nuzzled his nose into Rody's neck to smell deeply. He had come so hard. Vincent couldn't remember a more intense moment in his life. But he had to get up quickly, clean up, change his own underwear. However, he took a few moments to stare at his hand full of Rody's cum. Vincent brought his fingers to his lips to taste some of it.

Nothing. Almost nothing. That almost nothing impressed him.

It stung his tongue a little. Like lemons.

*

Rody had to leave. That was inevitable. In a way, it suited Vincent after what he'd done. A kind of guilt floated through him that he'd tried to suppress. He hadn't done anything wrong. He had tried to help Rody because he had helped him. Nothing wrong. The relief it had been to see that Rody had woken up the next morning with the same stupid smile directed at Vincent and said: "I slept better than usual, I feel so relieved." A remark that nearly choked Vincent as he sipped his coffee.

Proof that he hadn't done anything wrong. Rody and Vincent were friends - or something close to it. Friends helping friends. End of story.

Or not.

Vincent was trying to find a way to lure Rody into his house for as long as possible. The problem was that the redhead preferred to sleep in his own house, in his own bed, instead of the cozy room Vincent had prepared for him. So he had to be more creative. More vicious. He had no choice. But as usual, Rody made everything more complicated. From now on, their meetings were limited to the lunch break at school.

"Hm, Saturday? I can't, Vince. I'm... working."

Again.

"This afternoon? Sorry, I have a late shift. Another time!"

Again.

"Not possible. Another time?"

Every goddamn time. Rody had suddenly become very busy. Work, classes, everything that had never been a problem before - surprisingly, Rody had managed his schedule well to come to Vincent's. Now he just couldn't make it?

Vincent was tearing his hair out in frustration. He didn't like to insist with anyone, and doing it with Rody was a first for him. Sometimes Vincent wished he'd never met Rody because he'd already changed him so much. He got mad. Then sad. He missed Rody. Vincent began to think that Rody knew but wasn't saying anything. He knew that Vincent was a despicable man who had touched him in his most vulnerable state. This thought distressed Vincent so much in the last few days that he couldn't sleep a wink at night, his dark circles deepening as the days went by.

He hated Rody. He loved Rody. But above all, he dreamed of Rody. In his dreams, all he could see was the redhead's head, still lurking somewhere, pursuing Vincent without allowing him to escape the prison of feelings that this encounter had plunged him into. His dreams became increasingly morbid, turning into nightmares he couldn't remember. The focus remained on Rody. When had this fascination begun? Vincent had no idea. It was frightening to be attached to someone, a curse rooted in Vincent's heart and he knew it. He knew it wouldn't go away. It was just too late.

Like a broken record, Vincent went on, trying to sound distant as he asked Rody. The worst thing would be for Rody to see his desperation when he refused.

"Saturday night? I'm free!" Rody had finally agreed to Friday.

Vincent had immediately felt happier. The world was perfect again. Food no longer seemed so bland, so exhausting to swallow. And in front of the wide-eyed stares of the first years, Vincent made no comment when one of the juniors over-sauced his plate that day.

Vincent had done everything to make his house even more presentable than it already was. In a few hours, Rody would come. It was only the evening now, but Vincent could only practice a new recipe. Rody would help him to perfect it. Could Rody handle spicy food? It would be interesting to find out tonight. Rody seemed like the type who could eat anything.

While he was in the kitchen, his phone rang in the living room. Vincent didn't share his number with many people, as he hated to be disturbed. He went to the room to pick it up, already irritated.

“Hey Vince!”

Rody's cheerful voice made any annoyance disappear from Vincent.

“What, Rody? Did you get lost?”

“Not at all. First, I wanted to see if you were alright.”

Vincent couldn't see it, but he could sense the idiot's grin on the other end of the phone.

“I'm perfectly fine. No need to ask me every time.”

“But if one day you're not okay, how am I supposed to know?”

“I guess you would never know.”

Vincent knew that Rody was sulking.

"Never mind, I wanted to warn you about today."

"Why?" Vincent already didn't like what he was hearing.

"I'm sorry Vince, but I can't make it, I hope we can meet next time—”

Vincent had already hung up. This was too much. He clenched his fists in anger. Fuck this guy.

"Fuck!" He swung his phone at the wall, the device crashing to the floor in crumbs.

Vincent breathed hard. If Rody was in front of him, he could have punched him, for real. Vincent had to think. To think. To think that Rody wouldn't come back. He walked into the kitchen and recklessly threw everything he'd prepared into the garbage can.

It was no use anymore. Nothing had gone right in Vincent's life since he'd met him. Nothing was right with him.

Since Vincent had no one to blame, no Junior, no one but himself, he felt suffocated in his house. The fresh air would do him good, otherwise he'd get worse. He put on a dark jacket, put on his shoes and went out. The city was big enough, but Vincent knew the quietest places around his area, the most spacious corners of parks. He would relax by walking. And so he did. People walked a lot in the city. All the time. Vincent liked to walk, too. It was good for his health. It was recommended, and it would kill him less quickly than his cigarettes.

His cigarettes.

Vincent fumbled in his jacket pocket. Damn it. In his hurry he'd left his backpack at home. He'd buy some more on the way back, near the bookstore, where there was a little shop where he could find an ounce of bliss with his favorite brands of cigarettes. Alone, Vincent drifted through the streets, meeting faceless people. And he got tired of wandering around for no reason sooner than he'd expected. Having no purpose was terrifying. He stopped and made his way to the cigarette shop. He'd buy plenty of them. Fuck Rody's advice. If Vincent wanted to poison himself, he'd do it on his own. He didn't need the advice of a degenerate who couldn't cook at a culinary school.

"What the hell." Vincent froze, his eyes wide. He couldn't believe what he saw. His heart ripped in his chest. It hurt.

Across the street, on the opposite sidewalk, Vincent could see Rody on the terrace of a cafe. Rody wasn't alone, he was with Manon.

Rody and Manon. It all made sense.

This was no coincidence. You idiot.

Rody stared at Manon, as if she was the only person in the world, while she talked, her eyes glued to her plate.

Vincent would have given anything to make him stop. So that his heart wouldn't break. It was just awful. He felt so violently disgusted that he almost threw up, but decided to turn back so he wouldn't have to look again.

So Rody stopped coming because of this girl?

Vincent would come after her? Why? Why was life so unfair when he could finally feel for the first time? But what was he thinking? Two men together was vile. If he got too close to Rody, nothing good would come between them.

Nothing would.

Then this woman would defeat him. Vincent wouldn't accept that. He wouldn't.

*

He had called her. She answered immediately. How ironic, compared to Rody.

"Long time no see, Vincent," Manon greeted him. She smiled happily as she looked at him.

How would Rody react if he saw his little girlfriend accepting Vincent's invitations without flinching? The way she looked at him?

"It's my pleasure," Vincent smiled.

Night walks in the most romantic city under the light, the trap for tourists. Still, it remained a classic for couples. Manon's shoulder touched his arm as they walked, their hands brushed against each other without ever reaching. Vincent hated everything.

She followed him along the riverside quay.

"Where are you taking me?"

"I'm inviting you to dinner."

"You don't have to pay! I can pay for myself," Manon replied. She was a modest person.

"I insist, you're not bothering me. And don't worry, there will be nothing to pay for."

Vincent had to do what he had to do. Rody loved Manon so much. Vincent bet she was sweating so much love that the redhead had given it to her. Vincent felt it on the back of his tongue. Vincent took her to a small street near his house. There was no one there at that hour, no one to see them. To see him. He stood in front of it, then pushed open the door and let her in, locking it behind her. This place was supposed to be his future restaurant. Only the freezer worked. It was convenient for his meat.

"But it's empty in here!" Manon said in surprise as she turned on the light.

"There's a table over there, I'll set you up." Vincent said as he moved the two chairs from the wooden surface to the floor. "What you see there is the place for my future restaurant, I was thinking of calling it La Gueule de Saturne."

"What a name! It's transgressive." Manon sat down in the chair across from him. Reading the young woman's face, Vincent sensed that she was a little uncomfortable.

"Exactly. Are you familiar with the story of Saturne in Roman mythology?"

"Not too much, I had a friend who really liked mythology, but I didn't really pay attention," Manon replied, touching the chain around her neck. Vincent was curious what was inside, but he'd find out. Soon.

"He is the god of time and agriculture. One day, Saturne heard a prophecy that one of his children would dethrone him, just as he had done to his father, Uranus. They're gods, so they want to rule forever. As he explained, he saw Manon's attentive expression. "Overcome with fear that this day would come, Saturne made his decision one night. He sneaked into his children's room and devoured them."

"Devoured them? Did he...?"

"Yes, he ate them. His own children."

The end of the legend was too far-fetched for Vincent; he didn't need to point out that one of the children had survived thanks to its mother, and that the eaten children had survived all along in their father's womb. Everyone preferred the tragedy of the event, the irreparable truth. In real life, the dead never returned. Vincent and Saturne were similar, except that the person threatening his throne was right in front of him. Manon.

"What a terrible father. What's the point of having children if you end up doing this?"

"He loved his children until they threatened what was dearest to him, his throne."

What Vincent loved most was his dreams. His restaurant. And someone had gotten in the way, embodied in the person of Rody, who had become a part of his dream.

"I feel like Saturne in front of my child," Vincent said, his hand in his pocket, touching his knife. Manon's expression changed, she giggled nervously, her gaze shifted. Obviously very uneasy.

"Very funny... Seriously, can we... Where's the dinner?"

"It's right here."

"What do you mean?"

She won't go out. She won't come back home tonight.

Vincent will make sure of that.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Life was back to normal. It went on quietly for Vincent. As if nothing had happened. He had to get drunk over the next few days to forget. It was nothing serious. He'd done what was necessary. But the world reminded him of it. Rody's absence from school all week, sudden and unexplained, many knew this guy would drop out, so it surprised no one. No one except Vincent. Vincent had tried to call him back, but there was no answer. If he couldn't see Rody again, what he had done to Manon was for... nothing. His hope had just been torn away. Vincent was back where he started, in his loneliness. Loneliness made him productive, so he continued to work on his recipes, noticing the change between before and after. They looked perfect, too perfect. Rody's influence was gone.

Vincent blamed himself for letting this happen to him.

Love. What the hell sort of fucked up feeling was that? That feeling kept him awake, expecting... Expecting what?

Vincent tried to ignore his worries. He was capable of succeeding. The ringing of the doorbell interrupted his darkest thoughts. Vincent put down his knives in the kitchen, already angry. He had been so angry the last few days.

And it was late. Two o'clock in the morning. Who could bother him at this hour?

The police, maybe? No, he'd been careful. No one had seen them. He was just being paranoid. His anger was quickly replaced by an agonizing fear.

Moving slowly, his pulse quickening, he went to open the door. Vincent opened his eyes wide, his heart now racing in his chest.

"Hi Vince..." Rody held up his hand in greeting. He had a bag slung over his shoulder. The same one, torn on some sides, that he'd taken to the night's sleep.

"Rody? What are you doing here?"

"Sorry, I know it's late, but can I stay?" Rody's voice was uncertain. Far from the confident boy Vincent had known. He moved aside and let Rody into his apartment, closing the door behind them.

Why were Rody's eyes so red? Had he been crying? Vincent couldn't remember the last time that had happened to him. Seeing that Rody was sitting on the couch, Vincent brought him some water.

"Thanks, Vince," Rody said in a small voice as he took the glass. He drank without looking, Vincent noticed. He trusted him.

"What happened to you?"

Didn't Rody have any other friends? Apart from the mention of his ex-girlfriend, Vincent had never heard him talk about anyone else. If he had no one, Vincent would always be with him. Two lonely souls could only understand each other.

"It's just that..." Rody's hands were shaking, tears rolling down his cheeks, he tried to wipe them with his forearm, but with little success, he was crying so heavily. "I tried to contact her so many times. I screwed everything up."

Vincent hated that he was tearing up over Manon. She didn't deserve it. Vincent deserved it, more than she did, he would contain Rody's love. He tried to suppress the rage that was building up inside of him.

"Who are you talking about? What have you done?" Vincent asked. He had to pretend.

"Manon, you don't know her, but she's my ex-girlfriend. She's my friend now. And I wanted us to talk again, I knew she wouldn't give us another chance but I thought... I thought everything was fine, then she said no and she hasn't answered the phone since and... I... I..." He cried harder.

Vincent froze as he saw him soaking his pants with tears, Rody sniffling and whimpering like a sick man. How do you comfort a person who is crying that much?

First the snot. That was problematic. Vincent grabbed some tissues from the coffee table and handed one to the redhead. The young man blew his nose loudly, a "thank you" muffled by his wailing.

"Rody, you can stay here as long as you want. I'll be here."

It seemed like a good thing to say, but Rody cried harder than Vincent thought possible. *What the hell was this all about?*

"She needs to think, you don't have to push her for an answer. She's probably tired."

"You think so?"

"Yes, give her time."

"But what if... what if she never talks to me again or something has happened to her–"

"Rody."

Rody had to forget Manon. He wouldn't have a choice anyway, especially after what Vincent had done. She was in the cold room. Too late to back out.

"You're right, I don't know what I'm thinking. Thanks for listening to me and welcoming me, I don't have any friends... I lost everything with Manon, I feel like she was my only connection to the outside world and to other people".

That's what Vincent thought. It was perfect.

"Go take a shower, I'll prepare your guest room."

"You're so kind Vince, you don't seem like it when people don't know you... Thank you."

"Hurry before I change my mind."

Rody gave him a shy smile before disappearing down the hall. Vincent took a deep breath. First, he tidied up his kitchen, cleaning out the dirty utensils. His soufflé would have to wait until tomorrow. Then he went to the guest room and put new sheets on the mattress. Just as he had finished, the door opened. Vincent turned and caught his breath. Rody stood shirtless, a towel barely holding onto his hips, a few drops falling from his hair, running across his chest and then over his abs to drown in his navel. This was a total miracle, an absolute feast for the eyes, as it was so unexpected to have Rody at home tonight. Vincent must have stared too long. He saw Rody shift, obviously uncomfortable.

"I wanted to change here this time, there's my bag."

Vincent hadn't noticed the bag behind the door.

"Right. I'm out."

He walked towards the exit, trying not to pay any attention to Rody's body. Fingers grabbed Vincent's wrist to stop him. Vincent turned his head to see Rody look at him in surprise, immediately letting go, then dropping his eyes to the floor, his cheeks flushed.

"Sorry, I just wanted to thank you again. That's all I wanted to say. Nothing weird. I'm not... I mean..." The hell did that mean? Vincent had no idea. He'd already figured out that being with Rody meant deciphering a whole new language.

"No need to thank me a thousand times. Sleep."

Vincent slammed the door. His wrist burned where Rody had touched it. He rubbed it, deeply in awe.

Now he could rest. Rody was there. His cooking would taste better again.

*

"You clean up."

Vincent swung the broom at Rody. It was an equal exchange that suited Vincent. Now he had a maid at home. It might also satisfy Rody, since he complained about being useless. This late morning, while the other cleaned the apartment, Vincent took charge of preparing breakfast, ready to impress Rody with every dish.

"You made croissants! I don't even have to go to the bakery anymore," Rody said as he sat down at the kitchen table. Dark circles were forming under his eyes from lack of sleep. He hadn't slept well last night, Vincent guessed.

"I didn't make any bread." He set the tray down on the table, glaring at the redhead as he ate.

"All right, I'll get some." Rody started to get up, then was interrupted.

"No!" Vincent said too abruptly. He didn't want to lose sight of the boy. "No need, stay here."

Rody did as he was told and slowly sat back down in the chair, a bead of sweat seemed to form on his forehead, but Vincent paid no attention to it. He watched as Rody picked up a croissant and looked at it. For a long time. This bothered Vincent.

"Something wrong?"

Rody flinched, almost dropping the pastry.

"No! It's just that the croissant looks different from your other dishes."

"Different?"

"Yes... Did something happen?"

Vincent's eyes clouded. Only for a second. Then it returned to normal. He wasn't hungry anymore.

"No. Nothing happened. Eat," Vincent replied. It sounded like an order. Rody didn't protest and stuffed the croissant into his mouth. Vincent waited, hanging on Rody's lips.

"Delicious..." Rody wore a strained smile. Vincent clenched his fists on the table. Was he lying to him?

"Don't insult my cooking. If you don't like it, just say so. How else am I supposed to make any progress?"

He was annoyed. Rody put the rest back on his plate and looked away, obviously avoiding Vincent's gaze.

"Others will find your dishes perfect just as they are. It's me, I'm not feeling well today. I had a bad sleep..."

Rody knew exactly what the problem was. This lack of depth in Vincent's meals, his attempt to ingest his own creations, made him feel even more like he was swallowing emptiness. He made no further comment. He just stared at Rody, who ate under his gaze. The corners of the

redhead's eyes crinkled with happiness when he devoured a dish he liked. Here, this face was completely smooth.

This drove Vincent crazier and crazier in his seat. This was torture.

"By the way, Vince, are you going to school today?" The words snapped him out of his sour mood.

"If you hadn't left, you'd know that we use the holidays to study and practice. There are exams afterwards."

"Oh. True..."

Rody finally ate in small pieces, putting the crunchy morsels between his lips.

"Are you planning on coming back?" Vincent asked.

"Huh?"

"'School."

"Huh, I don't think so."

Vincent didn't deny that Rody had improved his cooking. He was grateful, in a way. Rody wasn't meant to be a cook. He'd make a better food critic accompanying Vincent wherever he went.

"Hey Vince."

"What?"

"I got tickets to a museum, it's not too far. I was thinking..." Rody paused, "That we could go together if you want."

Vincent was speechless for a few seconds. The idea of going on a date with Rody, like intimate partners, resonated so wonderfully in Vincent's ears.

"If you insist. I hope it's worth it, I don't like wasting my time," he agreed, rolling his eyes.

Vincent kept himself from saying that any activity with Rody was worth it. It didn't matter what it was.

*

Going out with Rody during the day hadn't been such a bad idea. The anger, the frustration, all the bad feelings left inside Vincent had calmed down in front of Rody's enthusiasm and awe in front of the statues. They were together, alone in the world, in their own little bubble. Vincent couldn't remember a day when he'd felt so fulfilled, although a hint of bitterness cracked him and he would deny the hollow in his heart. Rody was the missing part of his life. His garden. His everything.

When it was time to go home in the evening, Vincent was a little disappointed, but he remained reasonable. A strict rhythm would help them live together better. Rody was already in the shower. In the kitchen, Vincent brewed herbal tea on the counter. He stared at the dark liquid, at the sleeping pills crushed in his other hand. He had made his mind up, he had no choice. Rody was still thinking about Manon, even if he didn't talk about her anymore. When the redhead's eyes seemed far away, Vincent knew. He wished he could say it was because Rody didn't sleep well and Vincent was trying to be nice. But that was far from the truth.

The white powder melted into the infusion as Vincent stirred. He hoped the taste wouldn't be too different; he'd added a lemon peel just in case. The acidity would prevail.

"Vince!" Rody called from behind him, startling Vincent, who turned to face him.

Act normal.

"What is it now?"

"Our movie night!"

Did they have official "movie nights"? Vincent had no memory of that, but he wouldn't argue, it suited him.

He took two cups – it would be less suspicious if he drank too – and went into the living room. Rody was sitting on the couch in front of the TV, which was the only light in the room. When Rody wasn't there, Vincent didn't turn on the TV. He'd even thought of throwing it away one day, before he met him.

"Here, I made this for you. Don't spill it." Vincent handed Rody the tea.

"Thanks!"

Without hesitation, the redhead took it and drank a few sips. Vincent sat down next to him, a decent arm's length away from Rody. He glanced at the clock on the wall. Twenty-one o'clock.

"No scary movie, this time it's a comedy." Rody said. The movie started.

After ten minutes, Vincent realized that they didn't have the same sense of humor, because only Rody was laughing out loud. The truth was, Vincent couldn't focus on the insipid movie either, because he kept looking at the clock on the wall and then at Rody, who was slowly sipping his cup. He was more busy laughing than drinking. Vincent tapped his foot

imperceptibly while he drank, his impatience growing. It was only after about thirty minutes that Vincent heard the sign he needed. Rody yawned. Once. Twice, and then again. He even rubbed his eyes to keep them open.

"Vince, I think I'm just too tired to finish this all at once, we can do it tomorrow. Good night," Rody sighed as he set the mug down on the coffee table, his features wrinkled with exhaustion.

"Good night."

Vincent watched him leave. He turned off the TV and picked up the two cups. He washed them in the kitchen and dried his hands with a cloth.

He wanted to go to Rody's room right away, but it would be better to wait until the medicine had taken effect. He waited a long time, pacing up and down his house until he felt the time was right. Vincent was almost afraid to meet Rody.

Was this the right thing to do?

But Vincent had already gone too far just for this redhead. Withdrawing was out of the question. This was the reward for his hard work. His hands were dirty now.

Vincent entered Rody's room without backing down. His prey was in a profound sleep. Vincent had no intention of leaving a crumb of the redhead. Rody's slow breathing could be heard in the quiet room. Vincent climbed onto the bed without making the slightest sound. He studied Rody's face closely. His long lashes swept over his cheeks. He was so...

Vincent didn't have enough words to describe him. Just standing there was enough to thrill him. Gently, he brought their mouths together, closing the gap. Eyes closed, Vincent kissed him without putting too much pressure, enjoying the soft texture of Rody's lips. His hand ran through his red hair, which was surprisingly soft, some ends were a little dry, but Vincent couldn't care less. He broke off to admire the sleeping face. His only regret was that the lips didn't move, that Rody was unable to meet his gaze. Vincent's fingers ran over the collarbones, fascinated by the bone structure beneath him.

Vincent was so curious to know what was going on under that skin, he would have loved to crawl under that flesh, so consumed by his hunger for Rody. He drank in every breath the sleeping man exhaled. The illusion that Rody was a part of all this lay in his slight reactions, his little sighs aroused Vincent to the depths within him. He began unbuttoning Rody's shirt, pulling it apart, his fingers running up and down his chest. He had missed touching him. Of course, Vincent had tried not to think about it, seeing such activity as a distraction. But Rody had become much more than a distraction in his life. Vincent had done so much for him. Who could say otherwise? Manon? No. They were meant to be together, they would revolutionize the world. Rody had to realize his potential gift.

He kissed the redhead's neck several times with a restraint that made him ache. Vincent would leave no marks. Nothing for him to admire the next day. His fingers teased the hem of Rody's pants before he began to pull them down.

He would get a piece tonight. He reached down to his hips and tugged at the underwear. In the darkness, his eyes stared at the flaccid flesh between Rody's legs, unlike Vincent's hard flesh. He moved Rody's legs into a more comfortable position. He managed to find a place to lie down. Rody was as malleable as a toy.

Vincent's warm breath on Rody's crotch seemed to make the boy's feet twitch. One of Vincent's hands held Rody's inner thigh so the young man wouldn't accidentally close his legs in his sleep. Vincent's nostrils flared; he could smell Rody in the most intimate part of his body. The scent of a healthy, strong young man. Musky, masculine. Vincent's fingers caught the shaft, then he leaned in closer and closer. Then he noticed the mole on the inner thigh and an idea came to him. Vincent's mouth came to rest on the skin and he began to suck softly, then to bite without sinking his teeth too deeply.

"Mhmh..." Vincent heard, glancing at Rody's expression, it looked like he was having a good dream. Stepping back, Vincent saw a trace of his visit on the reddened skin, despite the lack of light. A sense of pride filled Vincent.

Rody would never see that mark. Vincent waited no longer to swallow the tip of Rody's cock between his lips. He exhaled slowly through his nose to get used to it and to enjoy the feeling. He felt the wetness on his tongue without the actual taste. His head went numb with arousal.

Damn. He was really doing it. He really was going to taste Rody. A special dish just for him.

Vincent could take it. More and more. Rody's cock sank into his throat with ease and Vincent didn't feel like pulling out. His gag reflex had died long time ago.

"*Hmn, ah*," Rody panted, his mouth opening further. Vincent had a sick curiosity to find out if Rody would make any more noises while awake.

Rody's cock had hardened so fast, ready to pierce Vincent's throat. He sucked, his eyes focused on Rody. He should have turned on a small lamp so he would not miss anything, but secrecy was much better. He shared this dirty secret with Rody. He could see Rody's eyebrows furrow, his head move slightly and his legs try to close once as Vincent's mouth and nose landed on his pelvis. Rody breathed out, his chest rising as he shook. Vincent was almost afraid he would wake up, but that didn't stop him.

He was becoming addicted to the thick, heavy weight on his tongue. All Vincent's senses were so saturated with Rody. His smell, his sounds, his little movements in the dark and that taste...

Vincent couldn't taste normally. Except right now, because Rody's body was producing something so acidic. Just what he needed.

Vincent sucked harder.

"Mmh!" Rody moaned, rubbing his head against the sheet. Vincent's mouth pulled away to trace the veins with his tongue all the way to the balls as he sucked, ready to draw every response he could from Rody. The sight was mesmerizing, Rody was panting and only

Vincent had the right to see and hear. He'd kill anyone just to have access to this. It was definitely worth it, even if his soul was damned. Vincent swallowed again, Rody's head sinking into the moist warmth. Wet sounds echoed the gasps of his sleeping partner. Sweat began to form on Vincent's forehead, sticking his hair lightly to his forehead as he focused on taking what interested him. His jaw tensed, his fingers soaked into Rody's thighs, his hips rolling on the bed with want – after this, he'd be in his own room groping himself as he thought back to that night.

Give it to me Rody, you're not the shy type , Vincent thought, his tongue flicking heavily, still licking. Expecting. He could feel Rody's cock throb violently in his mouth.

"Ah! Vince!" The loud moan mixed with the call of his name startled Vincent so much that he stopped, but it was no use now. Suddenly he felt cum filling his mouth and running down his throat, almost choking him. He pulled back in panic.

Crap. Crap. Vincent concentrated on Rody's face and saw that the young man was still asleep, except that he appeared more relaxed, a dreamy smile on his flushed, breathless face.

Why had he called his name? Never mind, Vincent was reassured that the other hadn't woken up. Vincent rolled the rest of the seed onto his tongue, intrigued by the sticky texture and the taste that tugged at his tongue, and swallowed. A sort of numbness settled over him, his throat ached, but Vincent's smile distorted his face, running a hand through his dark hair.

Maybe this was what love tasted like.

*

"Are you okay?" Vincent asked. Rody had spent the whole morning zoning out. But he had been the one to offer his help in the kitchen. Vincent didn't want an unaware person in the kitchen with him. Focus was the minimum requirement to accompany him. Vincent's words seemed to bring Rody back to reality.

"Yes, sorry Chef!" Rody exclaimed, his eyes fixed on the counter.

Vincent sighed in annoyance. The boy was so distracted that he'd managed to burn cereal earlier, a real achievement. It was fascinating to discover how bad Rody was at cooking, so

Vincent let it slide. He'd had to help him tie his apron several times because Rody couldn't stay still, preferring to look around the room at everything but him.

"Well, I don't need an incompetent here. You just watch and touch when I tell you to." Vincent was serious. This recipe was very important to him. To them.

Rody looked at the pile of meat that Vincent continued to cut.

"What are we going to do today?"

"A steak."

Vincent's hands were already working on the meat, shaping it under Rody's watchful eye. The texture would be tender and juicy if he did it right. It wouldn't be compact. Vincent was creating his ultimate dish, his masterpiece.

He seasoned it with freshly ground pepper and fleur de sel. All the ingredients Vincent used were of the highest quality. Especially his meat. He brushed it with herb oil.

"Maybe we can add some dried tomato powder?" Rody suggested. Relevant enough that Vincent didn't ignore it.

"Good idea. Go get it from the shelf."

Rody complied immediately. Vincent put the tube aside, intending to add it later.

"You didn't tell me what kind of meat you were cooking? Is it... beef? I don't think I've ever seen that at school."

"It's greasier than beef, almost like pork. That's what it is, pork."

Vincent looked at Rody with a smile. He wondered if the redhead could recognize his lover in this state. Vincent held himself back from bursting into laughter, a sick satisfaction running through his veins. This would confirm his theory. Rody grabbed his own arm as he stared at the flesh, as if he couldn't bear to see Vincent's face.

"You look less exhausted, Rody. Did you have a good night?" Vincent asked to switch the subject as he continued to cook. With tongs he grabbed the edge of the steak on the hot oil of the frying pan.

A small clatter of metal on the floor caught Vincent's attention and he saw Rody pick up the knife that had just fallen from the kitchen counter. His face was red all the way up to his ears.

"Y–yes, I did."

Before Vincent could tell him to clean the knife, Rody had already gone to the sink. Vincent's presence seemed to make him stutter or stumble, but he stayed. Vincent chose to concentrate on his recipe. He wasn't going to worry about Rody. Concentration was the key. He made his red wine sauce on another pan, carefully handling the steak. The whole thing had to absorb

the flavor. He was the conductor, the musician, but not the listener. The symphony didn't resonate in him. A very deaf conductor indeed.

It took hours to perfect his technique, to test what seemed appropriate. Vincent could feel the gaze behind him from the counter, following him.

After setting the table, he left the candles burning in the center. Finally he presented the carefully decorated dish. He placed it on the table and then pulled out the chair.

"Take a seat." Rody moved forward, one foot at a time, his shoulders slumped as if he were carrying a burden Vincent could not see. He sat down on the chair. Vincent stood in front of him while Rody grabbed the golden cutlery, the cutlery Rody had earned and Vincent had never used. No special occasion until now.

Rody observed his plate for a long minute.

"What's the matter? Don't you want to eat?" Vincent grew restless.

"It's just that it looks... everything you cook ends up looking so expensive."

"Don't worry, I'll keep the bill. You are poor as hell, but you are my assistant. So go ahead and eat. It was never a problem."

Rody moved the fork hesitantly. Vincent stopped himself from shaking in his seat as he watched him slice the meat, the red juice dripping deliciously onto the white plate. A mixture of excitement and apprehension stirred Vincent's insides as he stared with devouring eyes at Rody's full lips opening, the pink tongue appearing as juicy as the meat. Vincent was almost jealous of this piece of food that Rody was willing to put inside him, able to stay inside him. Nobody would tell him that it was unnatural. Nothing was more natural than to eat. Vincent's heart was ready to burst when he saw the meat approaching that bold mouth.

Rody was hypnotizing him, pushing him to do his worst to get the best out of him.

The whole sight was beyond immoral, but Vincent would rather slaughter himself than take his eyes off Rody for a second.

Rody blew on the piece, completely absorbed. Vincent loved it. He'd cooked it perfectly. Rody was teasing him, unaware of the devastating impact he was having on Vincent's body and mind.

"That looks so good..." Rody murmured, the fork coming closer. Vincent gulped. Never in his life had he been so nervous at the same time. It was incomparable to anything he'd felt in the past. It was different from his frustration when he cooked, his worry when he served his dish. Until Rody, Vincent had thought of nothing but self-fulfillment, nothing but himself. But now, more than anything, he wanted this meal to please Rody. That he would enjoy a meal that Vincent never could. His own hunger was satiated by the sight of the young man in front of him. This idiot that Vincent was supposed to despise, but to whom he was inexorably drawn, like a butterfly to a flame, ready to burn and die just to be close to that light once.

As the piece of steak disappeared between Rody's lips, Vincent stopped to breathe. Lungs swollen, pupils dilated, and stared at the redhead, eager to skin him alive. He watched Rody's jaw move, chewing the meat as he sniffed, his eyes creased.

"It might have been more bitter without the dried tomato, but..." Rody cut off another piece of steak to eat, except this time he looked Vincent straight in the eye. Vincent was so alarmed that his groin twitched. "It tastes wonderful."

Rody was driving Vincent crazy. It took every ounce of willpower he had to stop himself from throwing himself at the redhead to claim what was his. Good table manners were essential.

"Is that so?" He said as he poured them wine. He began to drink. His throat felt dry.

"It's different. The bitterness is disguised, but it's still there, it's part of the meat, but the way it's cooked is... full of care," Rody explained.

At this point, Vincent just wished he could cook for Rody every day until he disappeared.

"Aren't you eating anything?" Rody asked.

"The dish is meant for you. I'll eat something else later."

Vincent continued drinking. Rody was finishing his plate, tears falling from his eyes as he ate, he wiped them away with the sleeve of his shirt.

"What's the matter? Is it too bitter after all?" Vincent leaned across the table towards Rody.

"I'm sorry... I don't know why I'm crying. It reminds me that my girlfriend loved steak. She would have loved it. If only I'd had enough to buy her some."

Cold water had just been poured over Vincent. Of course, Rody had ruined everything with his useless, pathetic tears about Manon. Vincent's face grew darker, interrupting Rody's crying hiccups.

"Believe me, she won't come back if that kind of girl is so excessive with cash."

"She wasn't! Not at all... but she deserved everything I could give her." Rody smiled a little as he mentioned her.

Unbearable.

Vincent clicked his tongue, unable to hide his deep dissatisfaction.

"Finish your plate, Rody."

Like a dutiful puppy, the boy complied.

*

Things were going well between Vincent and Rody. As the days went by, Vincent had to take his exams at the school to validate part of his diploma. He knew he would pass. It was just a formality for him. He would work for the school during the week. Weekends were for him and Rody. Nights, too, except that only Vincent enjoyed them. A cup of tea and Rody never opened his eyes. He wondered what Rody was doing while he was gone. He hated the idea of not being able to keep an eye on him. He was afraid that one day he'd come home and find his apartment empty, without Rody. But that didn't happen. Instead, he was greeted by a clingy Rody who pushed him out of his comfort zone.

Vincent should have protested more. He could have. But Rody's puppy dog eyes were beginning to weaken him.

That was why they'd ended up at the street fair. It was supposed to be just a walk.

"Can we try this?" Rody begged, but he'd already gone to the stall. Vincent rolled his eyes in exasperation as he followed him. The noise from the people was already tiring him. Fortunately it wasn't crowded, probably because of the cold weather. The sky was gray and darkening. Wrapped in his long black coat, Vincent pulled up his scarf. A short, balding man was chatting with Rody by a huge barometer that read 0 to 2000. When Rody saw him coming, his face lit up.

"Vince, look! Just tap with the hammer and it'll show you your score. Try it!"

"Rody, this is a huge waste of time."

Time they could have spent elsewhere.

"Please try it. Just once."

Stop batting your eyelashes. It's not cute at all.

Vincent sighed again, pulled a bill out of his wallet and handed it to the showman. He didn't miss Rody's big smile.

"Go ahead, young man," the old man encouraged and handed him the hammer. It was heavy in Vincent's hands. He could do it. A good score. Especially since Rody was watching him.

He positioned himself well in front of the machine, then raised the hammer and struck, gathering all his strength on the pillar. The score climbed to 1300. A satisfying score, but one that made Vincent grit his teeth.

"Not bad, Vince!"

Vincent wished he could impress Rody. It pissed him off that he hadn't. He let go of the hammer, Rody caught it effortlessly and took it.

"My turn now!"

Rody stood in front of the machine, waited a few seconds, looked focused, then lifted the hammer and brought it down hard against the pillar. A loud thud almost shattered Vincent's eardrums, similar to an explosion. Vincent's eyes widened as he saw that the bell had just rung, meaning that Rody had broken all records.

"Wow! You really are tough, young man! I haven't seen that in a long time, don't break my machine," the fairground man laughed.

Why was he so damn strong?

A few passers-by looked at the new winner and made some impressed comments. Vincent stood speechless. Rody scratched the back of his head while talking to the old man. Vincent couldn't hear anything more until he realized that Rody had come back to him.

"We get free cotton candy and this!" He held up two tickets and a pair of round glasses with hypnotic lenses. Rody tried them on. They looked ridiculous. So ridiculous that it made Vincent laugh. Honestly, the prize was lame, but this guy made it look pretty special.

"Want to try them on, Vince?" Rody asked, ready to take off the glasses.

"No, I'm not wearing that. Besides, can you even see with those?"

"Not much, but... oh! Look, it's the shooting range!"

Vincent had already lost him. Rody had rushed to the stand and pulled Vincent's arm. He no longer had the strength to protest.

"Good morning, gentlemen! How can I help you?" A young blonde woman stood behind a counter. Behind her was a pile of bottles and stuffed animals.

"Me and my friend would like to try it!"

"Sure. Please yourselves. The prizes are proportional to the number of attempts, and they're on the wall. If you manage to break all the bottles, you go home with your prize."

Vincent couldn't believe that the redhead was paying for something so stupid, so childish. Rody was already holding the rifle between his fingers, his glasses in his hair so he could see better.

"Vince, look at me!" He was ready to shoot.

The woman pushed a button behind the rack. The bottles began to move, which seemed to surprise Rody; he missed his first bullet. Then the second, then the third, and so on. Vincent had never seen anyone with such poor accuracy. Guess you can't be good at everything. At the end of his turn, Rody sulked and handed the rifle back to the forrainee.

"I really wanted to win something better than this..." He pouted, holding up his glasses.

"Would you like to try it, sir? Consider it a free trial for your friend," the blonde spoke to Vincent as she handed him another rifle. He agreed. Vincent had already done some shooting in his youth. He knew all about hunting and prey. A little movement didn't scare him.

And he was right. Shooting, he managed to bring down the bottles, even as the pace quickened under Rody's astonished gaze.

"You're really amazing, Vince!"

Vincent felt his face warm at the compliment. He put the rifle down.

"That was easy, nothing to get excited about."

Now he was about to collect his prize. The blonde behind the counter smiled as she clapped her hands in congratulation.

"Which one do you want, Rody? The big teddy bear?" Vincent teased.

"No! I'm too old for that one! I want this one," Rody pointed to a small stuffed toy. It was a little guy dressed like a cook, holding a knife. "But it looks just like you, so scary. Maybe I should choose another one."

Vincent frowned, already annoyed by Rody's remark. That redhead didn't know when to keep his mouth shut, did he?

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"N-nothing! This one's perfect!" Rody gave him a nervous smile. Vincent ignored him while he pointed out the price he wanted to the lady. When he received it, Vincent looked at the stuffed plushie in his hands.

It was true, it looked just like him.

He was glad that Rody had chosen it.

*

It was this lack of consequence in Vincent's life that reinforced his belief in the righteousness of his actions. Killing Manon, disposing of the remains of her destroyed body that he didn't want to use in the garbage bins of the slaughterhouses. That was the sin that had allowed him to get Rody back. In the end, it didn't feel like a sin at all.

"You never talk about your family, Vince..." Rody remarked. He didn't even watch the movie on TV anymore. It had become background noise in their talks.

"Nothing more to say."

"You must come from a wealthy background. Even when you speak, I can feel the difference between you and me."

"I'm well educated, that's all."

His life before was complicated. His childhood. He'd always been a strange child. Vincent didn't feel like reminiscing.

"Me too! I mean, it's almost Christmas. Don't you want to call your family? Spend some time with them?"

"As you can see, there's no phone here anymore."

"Huh...true."

Vincent obviously didn't want to answer. Rody drank from the cup to hide from Vincent's gaze for a second. *Good.*

"And what about you? Why don't you go home and visit your parents?" Vincent asked, suddenly in a better mood. Rody looked a little bit taken aback by the change in Vincent's tone.

"My parents think I'm a failure. At first, they believed in me because I was an excellent student. I received honors and had many opportunities."

"What happened?"

Rody ran his hand over his neck in embarrassment.

"I used all my scholarship money to please my first girlfriend, and then she left me for another guy. My mother was furious. She told me I was too girl-crazy, too naive, and that it

would kill me one day. We had a big fight that day, and I've been out of the family home ever since.”

"Don't you think she's right?" The kind of story that couldn't happen to Vincent. On second thought, he'd done a lot worse.

"Maybe, but nothing's happened yet." Rody took another sip. Vincent's eyes grew darker with each swallow. He increased the dose. "All my girlfriends leave me, no matter what I do, it's not enough. One day I'd like to find a woman who won't leave me and then grow old together with my grandkids."

A goal that frightened Vincent to the depths of his soul. He crossed his legs on the couch.

"Is that really what you want?"

"Isn't that what everyone wants?"

Life was so simple with Rody.

"It's what everyone is supposed to want. Some people are just not meant for it." Vincent had never imagined a future with children. Let alone with a woman. Or anyone. No one until Rody.

"I have a lot of love to give. I just want a woman to understand that... I also wanted Manon to understand instead of disappearing." Rody was depressed. All his smiles weren't hiding the whole truth. One day he would realize that the person who could appreciate him for what he was was right next to him. At least Vincent hoped so.

Rody rubbed his eyes, looking more and more exhausted as the minutes passed. Vincent looked at the clock. It was about time.

"I'm going to get some sleep. Thanks for listening to me, Vince."

"Good night. Sleep well."

Rody smiled one last time, then stood up from the couch, taking his cup with him. Now Vincent only had to wait. Such moments were the hardest. He longed to be with Rody, to hold that voluptuous body, so different from his own. But he would have to wait.

He and Rody had an almost romantic relationship. In the past, Vincent would have been ashamed to even think that. He took some wine from his cabinet to give himself strength. He often got a little drunk, as if guilt dampened his spirits when he was about to give in to his urges. He stopped drinking when the time came. Time for dinner.

He entered Rody's room with light, discreet steps. As a result of letting him stay here, his noble room had become less formal, even a little messy if Vincent didn't call him back to order. Rody had even decorated his shelves with figurines that Vincent didn't recognize. He saw the stuffed character he'd won for Rody, the one that looked just like him, facing the wall. That detail made him frown.

Why was Rody doing that?

He decided not to dwell on the matter, although the realization lingered in the back of his mind. He had more serious things to attend to. Slowly he climbed onto the bed, the mattress sinking under his weight. He wasn't very heavy, not enough to wake a cat. Or rather a big one, sleeping like a rock.

As usual, Vincent took the time to lift Rody's top and plant kisses on his jaw. As soon as he touched him, the redhead's nipples pointed up, recognizing Vincent's fingers brushing under his chest. Rody had become so sensitive.

Vincent loved what this body had turned into thanks to him. Rody belonged to him. He removed Rody's pajama pants. A bulge already distorted the sleeping man's underwear. Vincent gently ran his hand through the red hair, silently praising him for his responsiveness, then pulled the briefs down.

What wouldn't he give to fuck Rody? But Vincent wasn't naive enough to believe that the other one wouldn't wake up. If he rammed into the redhead, Vincent wouldn't be able to stop himself. Instead, he made small, careful approaches. What Vincent loved most of all was to have a piece of Rody in his mouth. He no longer held back from taking what satisfied him. Vincent took the piece between his lips. The smell of Rody drifted into his nostrils, gradually killing his brain and making him feel alive again.

"Hmnh, ah..." Rody whimpered in his sleep, surely unable to process all the pleasure coursing through his body. His fingers trembled, moving at times, and his body tensed when the rush became too strong. Vincent learned more about Rody's naughty spots every day. The redhead's body was so lewd that it begged Vincent even more, spreading his legs so wide that Vincent didn't have to insist. One of Vincent's fingers explored, reached under Rody's balls and rubbed the secret area. This made Rody pant harder as Vincent continued to suck him off. His finger moved down, caressing the twitching hole.

He'd stuck his finger in there before. One finger was nothing. It wouldn't make Rody looser. Vincent would train him to take all his fingers one day, but for now Rody was still tight. He soaked it with saliva to make it less dry, then pushed his middle finger down to the knuckle and Rody's cock jerked hard into his throat. Vincent pulled back to breathe and admire his masterpiece, his muse reveling in the forbidden pleasure.

Rody didn't need a woman as long as Vincent was there to milk him every night. Besides, how could Rody ask for one when his hole was begging to be filled?

Vincent pushed his whole finger in, then bent it, curious to see.

"Ah!" He found it. Rody's cock was dripping now. Vincent took it back into his mouth and closed his eyes to savor it. Better than lemons for sure.

Rody was about to come, his chest swollen, his nipples hard, his feet moving a tad too much. Vincent remembered the time he'd had to hold his ankles while he'd devoured him. There was nothing dirty about Rody. He would eat anything.

"Vince!"

Not the first time the redhead had called him. Rody dreamed of him, an immense delight washed over him to be the source of this guy's deepest cravings. They were the same at night. Vincent felt those familiar stings invade his tongue, exciting all his senses. He grunted around the cock, his own stomach twisting with arousal. It only took a few seconds for Rody to burst into his mouth. He swallowed without missing a drop.

Then a loud scream startled him, causing him to pull away.

"Vince...what-what are you doing?!"

Fuck. In the darkness, wide-open green eyes stared at another young man, paler as if he were facing death.

"Oh God, I wasn't dreaming! Get off me!"

Holy *shit*.

Rody pushed Vincent off the bed, sending him crashing to the floor. The redhead tried to pull up his boxers as Vincent struggled to his feet. As soon as he was up, Rody was gone, running down the hall.

Vincent freaked out, the horror of his situation hitting him like a punch in the face. He was furious at himself, at Rody.

Crap. Crap. Crap. If Rody ran away, his world, his dreams for the future, could come to an end. Vincent rushed down the hallway, saw Rody's shadow about to enter the living room and wanted to get out of here as soon as possible.

This couldn't be happening. Vincent hurried into the kitchen and grabbed a knife. He saw Rody in the living room, pulling on the front door, but it was locked. The redhead was trapped like a rat.

"Don't come any closer!" Rody tried to run as Vincent threw himself at him. Rody did his best to push him away, running behind the table to put as much distance as possible between himself and Vincent. He looked at the knife and then at the brunet's face. He looked nauseated and truly frightened.

"Why did you do this to me?! You're sick!"

Oh. It could be that Vincent was the only one to experience this love, all things considered. It hurt.

"Because I wanted it. You're mine," Vincent growled as he started to run towards Rody. He wouldn't escape. He wouldn't. Rody fell onto the couch, but managed to throw himself to the floor to avoid being stabbed by Vincent's knife, which sank into the thickness. Vincent pulled his blade out of the couch, even more furious that he'd ruined it.

"We're both men! We just can't do this! It's just... disgusting!" Rody gasped in horror. He scrambled to his feet.

"You know what? Then I'm disgusting." Vincent stepped closer, Rody backed away.

"I knew something weird was going on, I knew it! The dreams I had, this house, your bathtub! You're a freak!"

"Like hell you could understand!" Vincent screamed. He was so damned infuriated, his veins pulsating with anger, his breath ragged. He raised the knife before noticing that Rody was rocking back and forth, the redhead's legs no longer able to stand and he collapsed.

Vincent lowered the knife, stunned. Was he that lucky?

"Oh no...the drugs..."

Rody crawled on the floor and tried to get up, in vain. He looked at Vincent as if he didn't recognize him.

"You knew there was something weird in the tea, but you drank it anyway?"

Vincent would have liked to laugh, but he was far too shocked because he simply couldn't understand. What was wrong with this idiot? He approached Rody, who shook his head, struggling to get up and looking fearful. He was obviously running out of adrenaline.

"No, no, please, Vince, we can find a way–"

"Whatever you say won't work." He squats down."We'll have some fun."

"No-" the knife near his face interrupted Rody.

"Behave now. If you cooperate, I'll let you go."

"R-really? You mean it?"

Vincent smiled. He had no intention to honor his words. In the end, killing Rody wasn't a must. They could work things out. As they should.

"Of course. But you have to put your heart to it."

Rody nodded slowly. He wasn't sure at all; he looked all sweaty.

"On all fours, Rody."

The boy complied. He was so slow, as if his life wasn't on the line. His forearms seemed to be struggling to support his weight. He bent over a little, his head lowered to the ground. From his posture, Vincent could see the back of his neck, the back of his shoulders shaking. It felt so degrading. Rody deserved it, considering how he had dismissed Vincent and his efforts.

"Good."

"Can... I go now?" So gullible.

"Not yet. You have to do something else for me, it's very easy, even you can do it."

Really easy.

"Now, bark," Vincent ordered.

"What?" Rody lifted his head to look at him, eyes wide open, mouth agape.

The knife and Vincent's gaze seemed to convince Rody. At first there was a muffled, tentative sound. Barely audible.

"I can't hear you."

"Woof," Rody blurted out, cheeks flushed, tears of shame in his eyes. Hardly a real bark, it was more like a broken tear.

"Louder."

"Woof!"

Perfect.

Vincent patted the redhead's head, a smug grin on his face.

"Good dog."

The compliment made Rody's face flush. Then Vincent placed himself behind him and watched as the briefs pressed against the redhead's bottom. The sight was so enticing that Vincent felt himself getting hard in his pants again. The tip of his knife began to lift one side of Rody's briefs, brushing against that tanned skin, almost up to Rody's testicles, making him jump.

"Vince! What are you doing?!" He panicked, trying to get away, and Vincent grabbed him by the hips to hold him.

"Chef. It's Chef for you, I already told you."

Vincent's mask had crumbled. All those months of pent-up frustration and endless longing were about to pay off.

"Chef, please, don't– don't cut my balls off."

Vincent chuckled at the plea.

"Don't worry. I won't hurt you if you behave."

Vincent's hand reached into Rody's underwear to grab his cock again, making the boy cry out.

"I'll even make you feel good."

"No– this is wrong! I'm not– ahh!" A groan interrupted Rody as Vincent's hand began to stroke him.

"What were you going to say?"

Vincent knew the weak spots, all he had to do was twist his wrist, bring his thumb up to rub under the tip and then over the head–

"No, no, please, your hand, *mngh* ," Rody turned into a panting mess, liquefying between Vincent's fingers.

"No?" Vincent leaned over, close to Rody's ear. He wanted to take a piece of the boy, to engulf him without the boy's tender heart having any choice but to accept it. Vincent's heart was ugly. There was so much to corrupt in Rody. "You say that, but..."

Knife in hand, Vincent grabbed the red hair and pulled it back, ignoring the painful whimper. His hand gripped the cock tightly and he quickened his pace. Rody fell beneath him with a moan, his forearms crashing to the floor, only his knees holding his body together. Vincent would have loved to see that face, but he could hear that broken voice, and it sounded sinful. It sent mixed signals through Vincent's body. His bulge hit between Rody's buttocks.

"You love it." A statement that made Rody squirm.

"Please, Vince, don't," Vincent's palm had become so wet from the boy underneath that couldn't help himself. The grip on Rody's hair tightened, pulling him violently, forcing the redhead to raise his head.

"So hard between my fingers, but you keep denying it. It's your own fault. Always tempting me, even your perfume," Vincent breathed into Rody's neck, his tongue roaming the nape under a muffled gasp. "Lemon, right? And you didn't want to get my attention?"

Rody moved his hips forward, unaware, as if he wanted to melt into Vincent's fist. "You say no, but you can't help but rub against my hand like a whore, how long has it been since you've been touched like that?"

Vincent heard a sob followed by several more. Rody was crying his eyes out, babbling words that made no sense, and it brought a smile to Vincent's face that the redhead was drowning in his own shame. The same shame that had clung to Vincent's skin ever since he'd met him. Rody had ruined his life, ruined the path Vincent had built for himself.

"You're going to cum because of a man, how does it feel?" The grip on Rody's cock became firmer and his strokes were ruthless. He loved how the shaft felt in his hand, loved how Rody was stretching towards him. Mostly, Vincent wanted him to understand where the hell he belonged.

" *Ah* , no, I don't want that, *mngh*, *ah*, please–" Rody made a strangled sound, his nails scratching the wooden floor, trying very hard not to give in. Vincent's arousal tugged at him, Rody struggled by moving and his butt rubbed Vincent through his pants. The friction felt so

good, so devastatingly pleasurable for him. He let out a grunt as he closed his eyes against Rody's ear, tingles of pleasure running through his lower abdomen, bringing him to the edge.

He had turned into a miserable man.

"No, no, no, *haah* ," Rody sounded desperate, torn by the fact that he felt so good in Vincent's grip. Vincent licked the tip of his ear before biting down, Rody shivered violently against him, a loud gasp escaping the redhead. They had never been so close as they were now. Rody writhed more and more, his growls getting louder. Vincent bit down harder, rolling his eyes as he felt the blood in his mouth, eager to savor the taste. He was becoming a beast because of this Rody. This guy unleashed the bestial side of him that Vincent had always tried to bury behind his controlled, high-class persona.

"Vince, Chef, ah, *shit*, *shit*," Rody swore, his mouth wide open as he came, shooting his spurts into Vincent's fist, dripping onto the floor, all shaky.

The sight was so heavenly for Vincent that it took all his willpower to contain himself and not come in his pants. Rody's knees collapsed to the floor as Vincent released him, the young man's forehead glued to the floor, his breath shallow and still crying.

"Can't you hold on any longer? No wonder your girlfriend left you," Vincent scoffed as he inspected his palm full of Rody's cum.

"Why... why are you doing this to me?!" Rody sputtered. He snapped.

"Why did you drink?" Vincent asked.

"I didn't drink it all."

"That doesn't answer my question."

Rody was a real idiot. Now he was silent, Vincent could hear his pitiful sniffles.

Why had Rody had to wake up?

"You made it for me," Rody mumbled, "and... and I thought we were... friends."

Was the reason that obvious? Vincent glanced down at his knife. He began to think.

"Rody," he called. The redhead turned his head to look at him, his eyes reddened with tears. Vincent began to lick his fingers, which were stained with a white liquid, and Rody gasped when he saw him do it, his pupils dilating. "I don't think of you as a friend."

He was much more than that, so much more than Vincent could ever describe. Rody had been his first spark of life, his first glimpse of a new world opening up to him, Rody had been his downfall, his end. Rody had given him a reason to cook, to be better than he could ever be. But Rody... he would never understand how much Vincent cherished him. How much Vincent could taste love, right in front of him.

"Oh..." That was all. Strangely, the tears ran down Rody's cheeks more abundantly.

"You are mine." Vincent grabbed the red hair again, then used his hand full of semen to spread the rest over the stunned face. How disgusting. Filthy. But it suited Rody so well. The other was confused, grossed out, his mouth twisted.

“Why–”

“Shut up.”

Would Rody ever get it? How much he'd impregnated Vincent without realizing it? And Vincent couldn't get rid of him. The boy was a curse that clung to him. He wouldn't get away unscathed. Neither of them would.

In a blunt gesture, Vincent pulled him by the arm and hair to force him to follow, ignoring his pleas. He still had more to do.

*

The easiest task had been to tie Rody's wrists to the headboard with ropes. Even if the drugs were still working, Vincent didn't know how long it would last in Rody's particular case if he had only drunk half the dose.

"This is wrong, so wrong.” Rody twisted his head on the pillow, horrified at the fact that Vincent had completely undressed him. Rody had never experienced being so exposed, so bendable. He was so used to being strong, to protecting his poor girlfriend. But Vincent wouldn't let him protect anyone, not even himself. He'd make sure he got into Rody's genes somehow.

"Pray harder because we're about to commit a great sin," Vincent said as he took off his shirt and dropped it on the floor. His knife had been left somewhere in the room.

"Stop! Vince, we can talk about this!" Rody panicked as he climbed onto the bed between his legs.

"Stop, stop," Vincent scoffed and repeated. "No matter what you say, it leads to the same result."

Rody wouldn't be able to convince him. Vincent looked over the body, a body he was slowly dissecting with his pupils. There was nothing to hide anymore. Vincent could see everything in the light of his room. Rody could not escape. Vincent's hands ran over his neck and down to his chest, making the redhead shiver.

"See? I don't have breasts, it's useless!" Rody kicked his feet.

"Stop fussing or I'll rip your ear off."

Vincent meant it. Rody stopped, but he watched every gesture with concern, saw Vincent's hands rubbing his skin as if he'd never touched it before, but at the same time with the dexterity he had when preparing a dish for which he knew the recipe. A thumb grazed his nipple and Rody gulped hard as he closed his eyes, his cheeks glowing with heat, startled by his own sensitivity.

"Eyes on me," Vincent growled. Rody forced himself to open his eyes again, especially when he noticed that one of Vincent's hands was exploring under his balls. Vincent saw the first signs of distress in Rody, who didn't know what to expect.

He could go dry. But that wasn't his goal. His goal was far worse. Vincent leaned over to his nightstand and fumbled in his drawer for some lube. He smeared it on his fingers. He needed to test the water.

A wet finger landed at the entrance, Rody waved his arms as he raised his head.

"What are you doing?! I'm not made for this ! You sicko–" he paused, gritting his teeth as he felt the finger sink in. Vincent paid no attention to his protests, just carried on feeling Rody's warmth around his finger. He could hardly move any further. It was too tight, too cramped. Vincent hadn't taken the lube to relieve Rody, but also to relieve himself; it would be difficult to get any satisfaction from this if the other one was so tense.

Their first time could not be like this. Vincent had often fantasized about it. Somehow, deep down, it didn't feel right, amidst all the desire that twisted his brain. But what choice did he have? Especially when he saw Rody staring at him with that accusing look on his face? Vincent would make him feel good. For once. His other hand gripped the limp cock in front of him and gave it lazy strokes.

"Please, Vince...listen to me, I...I don't know why you're doing this, but we can't– ah!" Another finger had sunk in too soon and Rody frowned under the pain. "Hurts, Vince, stop!"

When Rody was asleep, everything was easier. He was more open, less fussy.

Vincent's palm rubbed over the head of the cock to ease the tension, his fingernail passed over the vein to trace upward, and Rody moaned and lifted his hips in return – his body was too honest despite himself. His hole clenched around Vincent's fingers, eyes crossed as he let out a low growl. Sweat trickled down his forehead, sticking to his hair, he tried hard to breathe, to see what he was going through. He looked so beautiful and pathetic.

"You look good like that," Vincent whispered, fascinated. It wasn't enough. It was never enough. He wished he could eat Rody forever, if he could.

Vincent's fingers continued to probe inside. *Just a little. A little.* The fingers went up, twisted, and– "Ahh! Vince!"

There . Rody's thighs shook, shameful pleasure twisting the lines of his face. Vincent looked at him, saw nothing but red, his hair, his whole face down to his neck, the tip of his hard cock.

What a lovely sight.

Rody was right, this was wrong. What they were doing. Vincent's feelings. Vincent would go to hell for everything he had done, Rody would hate him for it, but... he didn't give a damn. He'd been lucky enough to get a bite and now he'd move on to the main dish. Vincent's fingers continued to hit the spot, rubbing it mercilessly. His hand was jerking Rody faster.

"Oh, shit," Rody moaned, burying his head in the pillow as he tried to hide his face, biting his lower lip hard enough to make it bleed. He twisted his wrists against the headboard to the point that Vincent questioned his ability to rip it off.

Rody was turning into a mess. He wasn't as tight as before, the longer Vincent kept scissoring him. His hole twitched, begging for more. Vincent fingered him deeper, his fingertips managing to reach that place only he knew. He was so happy to be the first, the only one to take Rody.

He slid a third finger inside. Rody swallowed easily, toes curled against the sheets, teeth clenched against the pillow in a desperate attempt not to make a sound – grunts escaped helplessly. The spot Vincent was stimulating drove Rody crazy. He found it incredible that Rody could produce so much precum, his cock swollen and gleaming, ready to explode in his fist at any moment.

"What a hungry hole," Vincent observed, his knuckles striking back home, his fingers spread wide, then folded back to rub harder beneath Rody's muffled cry. Drool ran down the corners of his lips. He looked so depraved as he tried to fight off the disgusting pleasure that coursed through his insides and built up in his guts.

"What's wrong with you? Why do you enjoy this?" Vincent asked to make him feel more ashamed – it worked, Rody cried louder. His brain was fogged with eagerness from Rody's dirty behavior. They were both so hard, overpowered by the same lust. "Do you want to come?"

The question was pointless. By the way Rody was sweating, his breath ragged, his cock pulsing and his muscles clenching around Vincent's fingers, the answer was so obvious. So, so close. Now Rody shut his eyes again, the reality was too painful for him. This displeased Vincent, who suddenly ceased to touch him. Rody glared at him.

"What's wrong?"

"Fuck you..." Rody coughed. He'd had enough. "You disgust me."

Vincent could have been hurt. Maybe he was. But that wasn't important, eating was. He freed his cock from his briefs and lubed himself up. It would be easier that way.

"I... I just wanted a place to stay, I didn't have enough to pay my rent, so why did I end up here," Rody admitted. Oh. Oh. Vincent hated him for his words. Strangling Rody wouldn't be so bad after all.

"You make me sick, Vince," Rody sobbed.

Not important.

Vincent grabbed under one knee with one hand and used the other to sink his cock into Rody in a single thrust. Screw the patience.

That was it. He was in. Vincent forgot the cruelty of the whole situation as he was sucked into the exquisite heat. The redhead didn't have enough tears left to cry, his face tense, his mouth open in a silent scream. He stretched his neck, his head thrown back, every muscle in his neck standing out, tempting Vincent to rip them out with his teeth if he wasn't lost in his own pleasure. He loved... fucking every part of him.

"Whores like you should shut up and just take it," he growled through his teeth, resentful. He slammed his hips against Rody's without waiting. A choked sound came out. Even if Vincent wanted to pull out, he couldn't. This hole gripped him so tightly that he had no chance of escaping. He was trapped inside Rody.

Love felt so *good*, so incredible. Bent over Rody's face, Vincent panted, fascinated by the twisted features of the face that haunted his dreams. This was better than any sick fantasy in Vincent's mind. He touched Rody, held his flaming skin. Vincent's cock was about to melt into the redhead's insides. His head was spinning from the force holding him down there.

"So tight," he groaned.

"Fuck you," Rody growled with a hateful glare. Vincent smiled as he thrusted. Hard. Rody's noise was dirty, almost inhuman. If Vincent looked up, he'd see sore wrists from the friction of the rope as Rody pulled. "Too much," Rody moaned, unable to do anything but force himself open because Vincent's cock was so long, sinking into him in ways Rody's mind couldn't even imagine. Because men weren't supposed to do that.

Vincent stopped when he realised what Rody meant. He felt the same. *Too much.* All his hair hid his eyes, he trembled against that mole-stained skin and he was sure the redhead could hear his heart beating madly in his chest. He was overwhelmed by the warmth pulsing around his crotch. Vincent didn't know what he would do after eating Rody; he couldn't leave, couldn't go anywhere.

Before his dark thoughts could overtake him, Vincent gave another thrust. And again. And again. He couldn't stop until he had destroyed Rody, ruined him for anyone else. Rody, who would one day look back on his own body soiled by Vincent.

"Vince, it's-hmn, ah, *hahh*," every moan knocked out of Rody's mouth by every single crushing pound. Vincent fucked him so hard that he was sure Rody could feel him deep in his stomach. So hard in his thrusts that it would be impossible for the redhead to walk without his help. Vincent's nails pierced the flesh of the thigh. His mind was literally collapsing,

turning to rubble in a lewd display of stupid, invasive pleasure. It was so vulgar. The sound of their skins colliding, the squeaking of the bed, Rody, Rody... Rody crying out his name.

"Vince!" So obscene. Lips swollen, bitten and destroyed, blood trickling down his chin, mixed with drool. Vincent was silly enough to lick there like a dog, growling because he felt, he felt so much. Rody groaned back, unable to hide. Vincent guessed he was aiming right for this spot, turning Rody even more stupid than he already was. Vincent was consumed by all his lust, pulling him like a puppet, he succumbed, he melted, panting against the redhead's jugular as he thrust.

He pounded, again and again, until Rody became an extended part of himself, or the other way around. Rody had managed to make him less selfish and, at the same time, less inclined to share. How loathsome. Rody hated him. He could see the pleasure straining the young man's muscles, matched by eager moans and choked with guilt.

“Ah, shit,” Vincent grunted, drowning. He licked the sweat beading near Rody's roots on his forehead. He was disgusting. He'd ruined his life, his soul, because of that redhead. And he'd do it all over again, if it meant having just a drop of him in the desert that had been Vincent's whole life. Overpowered by shock waves, deeply buried, Vincent no longer thought about anything.

"I love you," he blurted out, "I love you, *fuck*, I love you."

Vincent had never heard himself say those words before. Never. He heard a loud gasp and then Rody's breathing became labored, as if he was going to pass out or come at any moment. His wild eyes stared at Vincent, unseeing. Now Rody's walls threatened to milk Vincent dry. The redhead was definitely close.

As a punishment, Vincent squeezed the base of Rody's crotch to stop him. Rody broke into a sob.

"No, please, it's, please, mnh," Rody begged, his cock twitching, all red, in Vincent's imprisoning palm. So he knew.

"What do you want?" At this point, Vincent was just grinding torturously inside Rody, slow, brushing against that sweet spot that drove the man wild. The redhead moaned, burdened by his own pleasure, engulfed by his desires. It was just as hard for Vincent, but he was so close to his goal.

"I, I... Please, I'll be good, I promise, just..." Rody twisted his head, shaking, shame making him avoid his gaze. *So close.*

"What, Rody?"

Pathetic sighs, full of guilt. "Please, chef, make me come, please."

Rody was so easy.

The hand disappeared, freeing the redhead, who let out a relieved sigh, soon replaced by cries. Vincent picked up the pace, slamming into Rody hard, leaving him whimpering pathetically on the sheets. He was feral, the pleasure rolling off his shoulders down his spine, his claws soaking into every inch of Rody. He behaved like a beast in heat through Rody's pleas. Vincent boiled, his cock squeezed so hard that tingles ran through his flesh. He closed his eyes, colours flashing under his lids. He no longer looked human; his old counterpart, Vincent Charbonneau, the perfect cook, had burned to death somewhere in Rody. He was addicted to the feeling. He was going to come, soon.

"Rody," he begged, leaning forward to kiss him. His other hand grabbed Rody's jaw to force his mouth open, Vincent licked all the way inside, devouring hungrily, sucking the tip of the tongue. Saliva leaked from the corners of Rody's mouth. It was messy. Their union was beyond comprehension, inappropriate, unnatural. But Vincent loved it. He moaned even more against Rody's mouth as he felt him respond, kissing back to take everything from Vincent. To leave him with nothing. Vincent would give him everything.

Another squeeze and suddenly Vincent burst, moaning against the lips. Heavy spurts came out, burying themselves deep inside. He'd come so hard it felt sickening, the cum spilling out of Rody's hole to fill him. Rody shuddered, eyes rolling back in his head as he pulled away from Vincent, followed by broken moans and white rope painted all over himself.

Filthy. Amazing.

"Oh..." Rody sighed, eyes flickering as he looked at Vincent. He seemed completely worn out.

But Vincent felt himself getting hard again, seeing this lewd sight of laziness in front of him. Not enough.

*

Vincent was insatiable. He stripped away all of Rody's pride and threw it in a place that was nowhere to be found. He spread Rody's ass cheeks, lifted his hips and forced him to bend his knees up to his ears - Rody was amazingly flexible. Vincent was always ready to plunge into that all-consuming hole. He continued to thrust in.

"You look so happy, Rody. Stay here forever, don't you think?" Vincent panted under another yelp. "Outside, you'd be homeless. Here you have everything. A home, food, me."

So delicious.

"If you want children," *slap, slap, slap,* noises entered their ears, the surrounding air was so hot. A foretaste of hell. "We'll try every day, do you want that?"

Rody's tongue struggled to stay in his mouth, the addictive pleasure hitting him in the depths of his gut without stopping, a white pool forming on his belly, not knowing how many times he'd come tonight. He was spread, exposed, humiliated. All he could do was nod. Obediently. Just as Vincent wanted. No one had ever wanted to keep Rody as much as Vincent. Normally Rody would become a gaping plague that the others would want to get rid of at the speed of light, but Vincent had stayed by his side, not tired, not finding him exhausting, with Vince... it was both painful and rewarding. The thought went to his head and drove him insane.

"Yes, *hngh*, yes !" he let out, unable to disagree. Vincent smiled. Rody felt his heart race and overwhelm him as he looked at the other, torn by his own pathetic self and all the many strange, contradictory feelings that lived in his chest.

"Good."

He would be good for Vincent, a good, loyal dog. As long as he behaved, nothing bad would happen.

Chapter End Notes

I hope it was all right.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

- Vincent tries to navigate his new relationship with Rody (toxic)
- Consent still highly dubious given Rody's precarious situation
- Emotional dependence/anxious attachment mentioned

Also, I liked some of Racheldrawsthis sketches, which were fun to repeat in a different context.

If my work isn't mediocre, enjoy it. If not, suffer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Strangely, Rody had stayed. Vincent had been so afraid that the redhead would try to escape in the middle of the night that he'd been ready to kill him if he had to. But Rody had *stayed* , even with his ropes untied. That was the scariest part, the unknown. Because Vincent had no idea what to expect from Rody, who was more or less free.

This morning, Rody walked silently into the kitchen, his eyes glued to the floor, his gaze averted as he held his forearm. Vincent walked around with a knife at all times, well hidden under his clothes, watching the redhead's movements carefully. Rody could hold him down if he put his mind to it, he could knock Vincent down, so paying attention was not an option. It was more of a test, to see if Vincent could trust him. If slitting his throat wasn't necessary.

Otherwise, it would be very unfortunate for both of them.

"Rody," Vincent greeted. The redhead shivered at the call of his name, barely able to look up. He was drowning in his clothes, his shirt hiding the marks on his body as Vincent scanned him up and down.

"Hey Vince." The voice was shy, hoarse, Rody struggled to smile. He walked slowly, limping, each step a reminder that what had happened was real. He pulled up the chair and sat down.

Perhaps he was waiting for the perfect opportunity to kill Vincent. The atmosphere in the room was tense. Vincent kept staring, Rody traced his fingers nervously on the table. He gasped when he heard a noise and turned his head to see Vincent approaching, carrying a cup.

"I made you some coffee," Vincent said. He set the steaming cup down in front of Rody, then sat down in front of him.

Rody stared at the dark liquid for a long time. Vincent drank from his own cup before stopping.

"I didn't put anything in it, don't worry." Rody's fingers circled the mug. Vincent expected him to scream, to try to throw himself out the window at any moment, to run away. Surely he'd die. The second floor was high enough for anyone to break their neck on the cement. But nothing happened. Rody just stared at his cup, as if it would swallow him and not the other way around. He was so quiet that Vincent could hear the light wind outside knocking on his window pane.

"Obviously you don't have to trust me, but..." Vincent paused as he saw Rody take a few sips from his cup and then set it down, lips slightly parted.

"There's no sugar. It's too bitter."

He had just drank. What the hell did that mean? Vincent simply had no idea. The trust between them had been seriously damaged, and it was his own fault, but to see Rody jump into a potential trap of his own could only stir the raven inside. What a strange behavior. His suspicion grew.

"Sorry, I'll be right back." Vincent wasn't sorry at all, but he would be a terrible host if he didn't satisfy his guest.

He got up to get the box of sugar and put it on the table. Rody took a piece, then another, followed by others, all melting with a "splash" when they came in contact with his coffee. Vincent's eyes widened at the amount of sugar in the cup, and he was even more astonished to see Rody drinking. Was he trying to poison himself? Was Vincent a witness to a suicide attempt? He couldn't remember Rody being so in love with sweets. Something was off.

"It tastes good now," Rody smiled poorly. Even though Vincent couldn't taste anything, he knew that what Rody had ingested was disgusting. It exceeded the recommended amounts in every cookbook he'd ever looked through. He continued to watch Rody drink, admiring with silent fascination the red marks and bites on his neck. If Rody ran his hand down his neck, as he sometimes did, he would feel Vincent's marks. How gratifying.

Vincent rested his back on the counter, still aware that he had to keep an eye on Rody.

Wouldn't killing Rody be the best solution? Less trouble. Fewer witnesses. Less unpredictability. Vincent didn't feel like murdering him, especially after all he'd done for him.

Or maybe tie him up? But for how long? Love, or the lack of it, made everything unbearable and made people do the most terrible things. Locking Rody up was a good idea-

"Vince, I... I'm not leaving," Rody tightened his fingers around his cup, snapping Vincent out of his thoughts. "I see the way you look at me and I'm not going anywhere."

Empty eyes looked at him, disturbing Vincent to the core. "Where else would I go?"

A sickening satisfaction ran through Vincent at Rody's words. It was almost as if he'd forgotten their current situation. The fact that Rody had no one. No one at all. Vincent had taken away the only person he had left, and he was glad he had done it, if it made Rody so desperate.

"You could have fooled me," Vincent chuckled, then stepped closer to the redhead. His hand rested on his shoulder. "You want to stay here now?"

Rody shivered at the touch, as if he'd melted.

"Yes," he replied, looking away. Vincent began to hate Rody's habit of avoiding his gaze. It made Vincent feel like a complete monster - which he was, although Rody did not know how true that turned out to be. But for now, he could just be the one who took advantage of another young man's distress to do whatever he wanted with it.

"Prove it." Vincent's hand moved up to grab Rody's chin, forcing him to turn his head to look at him. His thumb brushed the redhead's bitten lips, his eyes devouring the flushed skin. Rody seemed speechless. "Here you don't have to pay rent."

Or at least Vincent didn't expect any money. Rody's presence alone fed him more than any nutrients. Vincent's breath caught in his throat when he saw Rody's lips open and catch his thumb to push the tip into his wet mouth. Rody's cheeks flushed red as he sucked while he looked at Vincent with moist eyes.

Fuck. Why did Rody look so miserably delicious? And why was he even threatening to cry?

Vincent's breathing quickened, his crotch twitched as he pushed his thumb further into the mouth. He heard a choking sound.

"Didn't you get enough last night?" Vincent asked. Well, what an excellent way to convince him. Rody struggled as he shook his head. He licked the thumb, circled it with his tongue to trap it. He growled around the skin and sent the vibrations into Vincent's body, making his insides chatter.

It was always dangerous to leave a part of one's body inside another. Rody could bite, tear everything out of him with the sheer force of his teeth to break free of Vincent's terrible hold, kill him in revenge, hide a knife and stab him in the throat, butcher him. With him in the house, Vincent would never sleep in peace. This kind of danger excited him even more. But Rody let him go, and Vincent stood there stupidly admiring the saliva on his thumb. God, he wanted Rody so badly. It didn't help that Vincent wanted to destroy the redhead's uncomfortable expression. This redhead aroused all his desires. Vincent was almost terrified of being fooled by them.

"Is it enough to stay?"

That was what it was all about. Only that. Rody spoke of it as payment, as if he owed him something. It was terrible. Vincent was unsure how to feel about the whole thing.

He cleared his throat, now uneasy despite himself. Alcohol certainly wouldn't help him process all this.

"I suppose that's enough for now."

However, something inside him whispered that what Rody gave him was clearly not enough.

What a terrible feeling. Something was missing.

*

As time passed, Vincent was far from naive. Nothing held Rody back in this place. Not even Vincent. Except that winter had begun long ago, and the snowy, icy streets gave a glimpse of wintry death to anyone who stayed out too long. It might have been guilt, or to feed the hollow in his chest, but Vincent had become more thoughtful.

"Here are some new clothes, just for you," Vincent said.

He didn't even need Rody to tell him his sizes; he knew them all. The clothes Rody had were barely enough. Just a good coat to cover himself, no sweaters to keep the heat up. Vincent bet Rody usually wore a bunch of tops to keep himself warm in the cold.

"Thanks, Vince," Rody grumbled.

The last few days had been dead silent, not even the sound of the half-broken TV could dampen that. And Rody loved TV, more than he usually did. He spent hours on the wrecked couch - a couch Vincent planned to throw away and replace because of the knife marks tearing the beautiful reddish fabric. Each time Vincent looked at it, he was reminded of how close he'd come to killing Rody. Rody who, while lying on it, would rather have his eyes glued to that TV show with a young housewife cooking. He had become a sort of lazy worm.

Vincent deliberately stood in front of the TV, blocking the view.

"Don't you want to see what's inside?" Vincent asked as he held out a filled bag. Vincent's questions were never really questions. He always had that tone that left no room for argument.

"Yes, of course," Rody slowly sat down on the sofa. The idea to buy clothes hadn't come out of nowhere. Rody's way of dressing was getting messy, his hair was disheveled, the beginnings of a beard were forming on his face. To be honest, it was this vegetative, almost dead state that had put Vincent at ease when he had gone outside. Rody wasn't going

anywhere. Trusting Rody was a necessity for their relationship to work, just as the redhead drank and ate what Vincent prepared.

Rody could hardly lift a finger, his gestures were half asleep as he looked at Vincent with a silly grin on his face, but not the dreamy good kind, more the extinguished one. He was really slow, even looking at the bag. He pulled out the extra warm clothes to examine them, and then Vincent scrutinized his every gesture. Most of the clothes were dark, the little color came in the form of a khaki green sweater that Rody observed more than the others. He liked that color, Vincent noted.

"Looks good, Vince-" he said before pausing to look at his bag, leaving the rest of the clothes on the couch. Vincent witnessed Rody's most vivid reaction in days. Surprise made his eyes and mouth wider, his cheeks redder. Rody wanted to say something, but he couldn't find the words. Vincent bent down and took the tube from the bottom of the bag.

"I forgot to take it out." Vincent hadn't forgotten. What a pleasure it was to see Rody blush; lately he'd been looking pale and morose. That was the only reason Vincent had put the item in the bag.

"This...this is..."

"Lube. Why so shy now?" He found Rody's stuttering so attractive. The young man stared at Vincent's pale fingers holding the tube, his eyebrows shifting betraying his nervousness. When he remained silent, Vincent could see that the other was trying to find his words. Which never happened so often before. Rody was the kind of person who would say anything that came into his head; there was no filter between his brain and his mouth. Many didn't have that honesty.

Vincent resented him for it.

"Are we... are we going to do it?" Rody asked. Vincent couldn't figure out what exactly he read in that familiar face. Was it fear? Expectation? Concern? Surely a mix of all these.

"Of course."

Rody held his breath.

"Not now." The sigh of relief that escaped the redhead didn't go unnoticed by Vincent. It only took a second for irritation to set in. "You have to take care of yourself, Rody."

Suddenly he grabbed Rody's jaw to force him to face him.

"You don't even shave anymore, the semblance of a hairstyle you used to have is completely gone, I see you hanging around in filthier and filthier clothes... I wonder if this is training for a future job as a homeless man."

His fingers clenched and dug deep into Rody's cheeks, making the young man squeal in pain. Vincent leaned closer to his face. Here he could see the beautiful green petals of his eyes

fading with alarm. The light beard hairs slipped under Vincent's fingertips, harsh, unpleasant and disorganized on that lovely face.

"Sorry Vince, I'll be better," Rody croaked. He struggled against Vincent's grip.

"Everything has to be clean for me. You're a clean boy, Rody, aren't you?" He squeezed harder. Rody's eyes moistened from the strength.

"Yes."

"Yes who?" Vincent's lips widened into a smile. He needed to be reminded who was in control here.

Rody pursed his lips for several long seconds, his eyes flickering. He already understood.

"Yes, Chef," he said, forcing himself to look at Vincent since he couldn't avoid him.

"Good."

As long as Vincent kept everything in order, he doubted that the situation would get out of hand like last time. Good thing Rody was willing to obey. Vincent's grip loosened and the hand that had once imprisoned the redhead now stroked gently down his cheek. Rody shivered at the touch, his anxious gaze seeming to scan Vincent's expression.

"Leave your new things here. Follow me."

Rody listened as he stood up, Vincent put the tube in his pants pocket, he would put it in his bedside table later. From now on he walked towards his place of interest. He entered the bathroom and let Rody step inside.

"Sit down."

Rody looked around, not sure where to sit, while Vincent fumbled in a cabinet under the sink. He pulled out some shaving cream and several blades, choosing the sharpest, then laid a small towel on the counter. He turned to see Rody sitting on a wooden stool in the corner of the bathroom.

"Come here, sit in front of the mirror with the stool," Vincent sighed. He needed Rody near the sink. "I need you to rinse your face with hot water."

"Vince, what are we doing?" Rody sounded worried as he approached and saw the sharp tool in Vincent's hand.

"Obviously, I'm preparing to slit your throat and spill your internal organs," he saw Rody freeze and turn pale as he spoke. In a way Vincent was amused, in another way he was quite blasé. He put the blade down. "I'm just going to shave you. Now do as I say. Don't make me repeat myself." Vincent's tone wasn't threatening, but his intentions were.

"Y-yes!"

Rody leaned over the sink and turned on some scalding water, almost burning himself as he splashed it on his face. Vincent sighed again - this happened far too often when Rody was around. What would he do with this guy, really? Vincent moved closer to him.

"Is that how you wash your face?"

Rody turned his head towards him, drops running down his chin and his lips twisted in pain. Vincent really wondered how Rody had managed to live on his own so far. Vincent turned down the heat and the water spray by turning the knob, grabbed a cleanser and squeezed the product onto his palm. His other hand held the red hair to keep it from getting too wet, then his fingers kneaded the product into the blushing face. He held Rody's head down. Vincent's movements were precise and circular, with enough pressure to allow the cleanser to penetrate. When he was finished, Vincent took the towel and gently ran it over the wet skin. Rody was calm, docile throughout. Vincent let him sit down and picked up the blade. The blade was brand new. Vincent had plenty of them in his cabinet, just in case.

Rody's eyes never left the sharp end, his pupils moving back and forth between it and Vincent. Fear crackled through Rody's entire body, through the stiff way he shifted on his stool. He exulted in the crackling anguish he tried to hide. But Vincent knew better.

It was... thrilling.

And also depressing.

"Tilt your head, I have to see," he commanded as he stepped up behind Rody. The redhead hesitated, far too livid for that to be normal. Ah, maybe Vincent had really traumatized him. He hadn't paid attention. Not enough. He had torn Rody to shreds, brought him back from the dream to the brutal reality that if he didn't do what Vincent said, things would get really ugly.

Finally, the redhead complied, closing his eyes to hide the fear that made his veins stand out, and Vincent got a better look at that beautiful jaw. He spread the shaving foam and with the same care he took when preparing Rody's meal, he ran the blade carefully across the redhead's cheek. He felt Rody flinch and shake like a leaf, almost causing him to miss.

"Don't move if you don't want to get cut," Vincent warned. He was already tired and if the other prevented him from doing his job properly, it would only result in a fatal, painful mistake. "I'll take care of you." Right from the start.

Vincent hated ingratitude. Especially when the truth was that Vincent never had that much attention to give to anyone but Rody. Vincent felt as if Rody was teaching him to take his first steps as a newborn.

"Sorry." Rody remained silent. For long minutes he let himself go to the point where his eyes were closed, which relaxed Vincent. Between the rinsing of the blade and its passage over Rody's soft skin, Vincent was in a state of extreme focus. As far as he could tell, Rody wasn't very hairy, but if he let himself go, he would grow a beard. Vincent was absolutely firm: no beards in his kitchen. As he continued, he noticed the small, barely noticeable cuts on Rody's skin, a sign of clumsiness. It wasn't even surprising.

As the titanium tip grazed the jugular, Vincent saw Rody's Adam's apple tremble under the blade. His eyes were open again. Vincent could feel the boy analyzing the scene in the mirror. Vincent's other hand ran down Rody's neck, digging in to find his pulse. Rody's heart was beating so hard that it pierced Vincent's eardrums, each pulse echoing in his own body. Vincent saw that Rody's fists were clenched against his thighs, trying to keep himself still. A *well-trained dog*.

Vincent understood the growing fear. In one move he could slit his throat and Rody would be pissing blood all over the bathroom marble. This power intoxicated Vincent. Rody wouldn't have time to do anything but press his panicked palms against his neck to stop the bleeding. How unfortunate that would be. It was a silent reminder. Vincent made no such move. The blade gently slid away. A splash of water later, Rody's skin was fresh.

"It's over," Vincent said as he began to clean the blade. "Make sure I don't have to do it again."

"Thanks Vince, it's never felt so smooth." Rody ran his fingers over his cheeks in amazement. Vincent was happy to have gotten that reaction out of Rody.

He started to clean up, leaving Rody to admire himself in the mirror.

"Vince," Rody called.

Vincent turned his head towards him after he'd left his closets. Rody's cheeks were pink with embarrassment, but for once his gaze didn't avoid him.

"When... when are we going to... you know!" The words came out awkwardly. "I mean," Rody's hand went to his neck. "You said something about...every day."

Vincent stared. He couldn't believe it.

"But you haven't touched me since that day," Rody went on. "And I thought... that you didn't want me anymore? If that makes sense."

The silence grew thick, suffocating. Rody could no longer stand in front of Vincent's steady gaze and fidgeted at his collar with trembling fingers.

"It's getting late Rody, you should get some rest. You look like shit."

Then Vincent left the room, slamming the door behind him.

*

Vincent wanted to spend his time with Rody, even if it could be tiring. Or at least it used to be, since Rody was the kind of guy who couldn't stay put when he saw something that might attract his attention, and he dragged Vincent everywhere. Nowadays it was completely different. Vincent thought that by taking him to the Christmas Market, Rody would be more cheerful, especially after seeing the snow-covered streets and the festive street displays. But not only wasn't Rody thrilled by the twinkling lights in the night, he had followed Vincent like a shadow in complete silence. Vincent missed the way that Rody would chatter away at every single opportunity. Hiding his disappointment, Vincent ran his few errands under the flaming lanterns, wandering between the stands. Not everything at the Christmas market was a waste, not least the seafood.

"Vincent! My young Vincent!" a voice called.

Vincent turned in the direction of the voice and saw an old lady, wrapped in a veil that covered her ears, waving at him to come over to her stall. He recognized her.

"Miss Lisbonne, it's been a long time, how are you?" He smiled as he approached. Since he was seventeen, it wasn't unusual for him to come here. She used to sell glassware of very good quality and at a reasonable price - or Vincent knew how to negotiate. The little lady squinted her brown eyes under her monocle.

"Very good! You're growing up so well, I can tell every time I see you! Who's the charming young man with you?" She pointed to Rody, all bundled up in his new clothes, hiding more behind his scarf, he answered with a simple nod of greeting. Vincent looked at Rody.

"He's just a classmate from my school," he replied. Vincent didn't have to look twice at Rody to feel the heavy gaze.

"Interesting! I don't usually see you with anyone. You must be something special, young man!" The line embarrassed Vincent that she would expose him like that. But Rody had seen the worst of himself. He heard the redhead inhale and then exhale, the air steaming from the cold as it left his mouth. His hands stayed in his pockets most of the time, despite the gloves.

"You can call me Rody, ma'am!" The sudden hint of enthusiasm in his tone intrigued Vincent.

"Rody, what a lovely name for a lovely young man," the old lady chuckled. Vincent watched the scene as Rody easily succumbed to the flattery while continuing to chat with Madame Lisbonne. His stomach filled with a special warmth at the sight of Rody's smile. The sight was precious. For a while, the noise of passers-by in the streets, the wind blowing, and the discussion between Rody and this lady fell on deaf ears, as Vincent was so captivated by the redhead's familiar grin.

"Vincent, what do you think of this for your comrade?"

He looked at what she showed him. The elderly woman held out a gilded locket, half open, with intricate engravings on the cover. Rody's eyes sparkled as he looked at this simple object. Though it was a beautiful find, Rody marveled at nothing. But it was better than his empty irises staring at Vincent in the morning.

"It reminds me of a good souvenir... it looks really nice, but it seems expensive..."

"I'll take it," Vincent interrupted, catching Rody off guard. He pulled out his wallet, his eyes lingering on the label to see the far too expensive price tag - Vincent would have preferred to buy it in a real boutique, but the quality seemed fine - and pulled out a few bills to give to the merchant. The old lady smiled brightly, then proceeded to prepare a package in a pretty red box, which she placed in a small bag.

"Here it is! Nice to do business with you, Vincent. What a pleasure to meet such a fine gentleman as Rody!" Vincent picked up the gift, Rody smiled at the old lady one last time, they both waved to her one last time. They had to leave the market.

"She seems very nice," Rody commented, then turned to Vincent as they walked along the sidewalk, slowly moving away from the crowd. "Thanks Vince, you didn't have to."

"Is that what you wanted?" Vincent asked.

"Yes, but..."

"So it's fine."

Vincent didn't mind at all. After all, Rody lived with him, he took care of them.

"It's just that I'm used to provide. I forgot how it felt when people bought things from me..." Rody smiled a bit. Vincent's heart raced. He had caused this, he had succeeded.

"Ask for what you need, it's not like you have a choice," Vincent said. Rody gave a bigger smile.

Oh. Vincent was such a *weak* man.

As they continued, they reached a quiet park, empty of people. Rody gazed at the geese floating on the lake a few meters away, the moon reflected in the icy water. Vincent stopped with him, not to admire the starry sky, but to silently marvel at Rody, who enjoyed the sight as if he were seeing it for the first time.

"It's a wonder the ice hasn't formed," Rody remarked.

"The lake is kept at a good temperature for the animals."

Rody looked so intently at the geese that Vincent knew he wanted to feed them, even though it was forbidden, according to the plaque beside the lake. If Rody loved the geese so much, Vincent knew what he would prepare for dinner that week. He watched the birds on the lake for a long time, almost envious. When he finally stopped looking at the silly birds, he was surprised not to find Rody standing next to him.

Had he taken advantage of his minute's inattention to run away–

"Phew! Cold!"

Rody gritted his teeth. Vincent turned to see the redhead trying to roll a large snow-shaped ball across the ground.

"What are you doing?"

Vincent came closer.

"Someone left this snowman unfinished."

"So?"

"I just want to finish it."

What a child . He sighed, already annoyed. Vincent didn't have time for that. He had bags in his hands, it was cold, it was already the night because of the winter that had covered the sky in darkness so early.

Then Vincent felt the impact of a ball on his chest, he looked at the snow staining the black fabric of his coat and then looked up at Rody, still with his arm outstretched, who looked horrified. He had thrown snow at him.

"Sorry, Vince! I didn't mean to aim here!"

Vincent dropped his bags to the ground, his face dark. Rody's look of concern turned to amazement as Vincent hurried to gather as much snow as he could. He threw the snowball in Rody's face in revenge.

"No fair, I wasn't ready!" Rody complained as he brushed the snow from his cheeks. Now he was grinning broadly as he prepared for another throw.

That was what Vincent wanted to see.

"Did you think I was?"

This was ridiculous. Vincent had never liked snowball fights. It was childish, it made his clothes wet, it forced him to run around to avoid getting hit. But Rody was making it all better, trapping him in a stupid cage called love, and there was absolutely nothing Vincent could do about it.

In the moonlight, in the snow-covered park, they looked like two small children running around each other.

*

Because Vincent couldn't resist Rody. He had to ruin everything.

"It was a beautiful night outside."

Rody took off his coat to hang it on the coat rack, his mood dreamy. The redhead acted as if nothing bad had happened, as if they were just friends. It was a nice illusion, especially if Rody didn't realize how insistently Vincent was watching his every move. Vincent let his coat, shoes and bag fall to the floor, unable to look away from the other.

"But it's better inside, it's so warm-"

Like a hungry wolf, Vincent pinned Rody against the entrance wall, both hands gripping the wrists pressed against the hard surface. Wide green eyes stared at him, their noses almost touching.

Vincent would get a bite tonight. Even if he had to tear it off with his teeth.

"What's wrong Vince?" Rody sounded sharper, echoing with fear. That was Vincent's power, to turn this peaceful expression into one full of worry. Vincent wondered what he looked like when the beast in him rose. It had been so nourished by seeing Rody so happy tonight. Vincent didn't know how to deal with his feelings that were destroying all his common sense. Rody should never have been there.

Without asking, Vincent's lips landed fervently on the redhead's, kissing his fears in a daze that threatened to send him over the edge. Vincent's fingers tightened on Rody's wrists, afraid that the redhead might move a millimeter. But obedient as he was, Rody didn't move. Instead, he relaxed and let his eyes close. A sigh escaped him and sank into Vincent's ears. Rody joined in. They were kissing. It almost seemed like a dream to Vincent. Rody wasn't asleep. His lips moved, he moaned against Vincent. Vincent tried to bring them closer than they already were, to melt their flesh even more. His impatient tongue slipped in, pleasure coursing through his veins as it met the redhead's. Their mouths fused, slowly, and each kiss pressed against Rody's soft lips disconnected more of Vincent's mind.

Seriously, what had become of him?

This existential crisis seemed pointless as Rody turned into a sighing mess beneath him, because of him. Pulling away, Vincent was confronted with the ruined face, the swollen lips, the ragged breath. His half-open, illuminated gaze scrutinized Vincent's face in return.

He looked so good. As if he was asking Vincent to nibble at him bit by bit. Rody was sweet to death.

"Rody," Vincent let go of one of the wrists and ran his hand over Rody's chest down to his stomach. A shiver ran through the redhead. "It's been a while, hasn't it?"

Too long. Rody's touch made him snap. Inevitably. It felt so utterly pathetic, Vincent thought. He loathed this part of himself that wanted to fit into Rody in such a creepy way.

"Do you want to touch me?" Rody's blood rose to his face, coloring his cheekbones deliciously. Vincent remained entranced by the sinuous paths Rody's body took in response to his touch. He seemed ready to flinch at the slightest touch, giving Vincent the impression that he might collapse.

The question hung in the air. Their breaths mingled until Vincent stepped forward to reclaim Rody's lips and silence him. The whimper that came out was a godsend to his ears. Rody was so damn easy to handle. He was his little pet, his little puppy wagging his tail to please Vincent. But the answer became clearer when Vincent's fingers went under Rody's sweater. The redhead shivered even more as he felt their coldness on his burning flesh. It wasn't Vincent's fault that his own body regulated the temperature like that. Rody's body was hot as lava, it was fascinating.

Soon Rody was panting against his mouth as they made out, sinking into each other. Vincent felt Rody's hand grab his shoulder, fingers clenching the fabric. Rody's sighs were a symphony that Vincent was sure he'd never tire of. As their tongues tangled, a dirty suction emerged, making Rody sigh harder and Vincent weak inside.

Love wasn't strong enough to describe what he felt with Rody. Rody's image was etched into every atom of his entire being. Vincent moved to get closer - he was never close enough to Rody. His leg lodged between the redhead's thighs, bumping against the half-hard bulge.

"Hmnh, ah," Rody let out a choked cry. He broke the kiss and looked down at Vincent's thigh pressing shamelessly against his hard-on.

"That hard already? Did you miss it that much," Vincent whispered close to his ear, amused. The embarrassment on Rody's face made Vincent even prouder of himself, and the redhead pinched his lower lip. "I need to hear you say it."

He pressed harder.

"Ah! Vince!" Rody's mouth fell open, twisted with pleasure, his head pressed against the wall and his hand tightened on his shoulders. Vincent felt the erection harden against his thigh.

"Tell me, Rody," Vincent rubbed viciously, the friction must have been so painfully pleasurable considering how much the young man was struggling to control himself, tremors running down his entire spine, his breath coming in shaky gasps. "Or...should I stop?" Then Vincent stopped moving, his leg still.

" *Please, nnh* -" Rody groaned, helpless. His head went down, but Vincent couldn't blame him, especially when he realized to his surprise that the redhead's hips were now moving on their own, chasing the friction. Every roll of his hips against Vincent's thigh added fuel to the fire. Burning heat filled Vincent's lower abdomen, swelling his cock trapped in his pants. He was already so desperately hard himself. Did Rody know what he was doing?

The sight in front of him was full of lust, giving in to Rody's own obscenity. The redhead's eyes were closed, he was rubbing himself against the thigh Vincent was offering him like a rutting animal. Rody acted wildly, as if driven by instinct.

"Vince, *mnh, I-*, *ah*," Rody choked on his own moan, his eyes clouding. Damn, Rody was squeezing his shoulder so fucking hard that Vincent would have a mark, a bruise maybe. Rody was marking him without knowing it. The thought seared itself into his brain, slowly driving Vincent to complete madness. Given the noises Rody was making, the blushing on his neck, he was about to come. Vincent knew him so well by now. Rody was going to come like a pathetic dog while he was humping his leg. It was so hot, too hot for Vincent.

With no mercy, he took a step back. The heat dissipated a bit, but it remained holed up inside Vincent, gripping his insides viciously. Rody panted loudly on weak legs, a confused look in his eyes.

"Vince, what-" Vincent didn't let him think. He grabbed Rody by the wrist and pulled him into the living room. Vincent released him only to sit down on the banquettes glued to the wall, leaving Rody standing in front of him. The young man shamefully tried to hide his excitement by tugging at his shirt. It was quite amusing, the contrast between this shy and eager attitude.

"Rody, if you want to come, you have to satisfy me first," Vincent's tone was thick and intoxicatingly honeyed, making the other boy blush further. "On your knees."

This command seemed to freeze the redhead, the hesitation clearly visible on his face, and he tugged at his sweater even more, trying to hide from Vincent's dark gaze. Very slowly, Rody put both his knees on the floor, his eyes wide.

"Come closer." Vincent spread his legs. Rody gulped. Vincent didn't miss the Adam's apple trembling with nervousness.

He crawled to his host on all fours, which made Vincent smile tenderly. He wanted to go easy on him this time.

"Undo my pants." Rody's ears turned red.

Trembling fingers reached for his belt, the metallic clank and zipper echoing in the room. Rody held his breath, his eyes fixed on the swollen bulge in his underwear.

"Come on, Rody, I'm not going to do everything for you. Take it out."

He complied, an uncertain hand fumbling in the slit of his underwear. Finally, Vincent's shaft whipped through the air. Damn, it was so hard and swollen. He could feel Rody's hot breath on it. The best part was to feel the redhead's eyes trace every bluish vein beneath the pale skin until they lingered on the angry red tip, pulsing with desire. Vincent's cock twitched at Rody's obvious curiosity. As if Rody didn't have the same thing between his legs. He was silent.

"What is it?" Vincent raised an eyebrow. "Don't you know how to please me?"

"Well– of course not, it's just that... men..." He stopped himself as he met Vincent's dark gaze, cold sweat running down Rody's neck. He was surely aware that his next words could really

upset Vincent. But Vincent's fingers passed behind his ear, coming down to gently stroke his jawline.

"Is that so?" Vincent wondered. "So you know. Because you and I are the same."

Rody's naivete wouldn't save him. He was clever enough when he wanted to be. Vincent didn't need to be reminded of the social anomaly they embodied.

"Use your fucking mouth."

Vincent's hand grabbed the back of Rody's head, forcing him closer. Rody's mouth let out a yelp and Vincent took the opportunity to plunge the tip of his cock between the pouting lips.

"If you bite me, it won't end well," Vincent warned him, his fingers gripping his hair tighter to hold him down. He was already dizzy from the heat engulfing him. *Fuck, Rody's mouth.*

The growl the redhead made around his cock climbed all the way up Vincent's spine, sending sparks of pleasure up his spine. He rolled his eyes as he sank deeper into Rody's throat. Sounds of gagging reached his ears. Rody was literally choking on him. Watery green eyes looked up at Vincent, tears streaming down red cheeks. It was such a filthy sight.

Damn. So sweet. Rody looked so fucked up and it made Vincent want to do something worse. To tempt the devil. He lifted his hips, his hand tightening the red curls between his fingers. When Rody's nose brushed against his pubic hair, the young man's eyes widened in panic and his hands came to grasp one of Vincent's thighs. He tapped furiously. As he grew more agitated, his mouth vibrated with grunts of protest that reached deep into Vincent's core. But he remained resolute, instead holding his grip for long, agonizing seconds where only wet sounds and muffled pleas could be heard.

"Oh, shit, ah," Vincent panted. "I've, *hmn* – found a way to shut you up."

Then he released him. Immediately, Rody broke free, taking large gulps of air like a man who had nearly drowned.

"V-Vince, you almost killed me!" He held his throat. His voice was hoarse.

"My mistake." Vincent felt no remorse. "Now you know what to do. Get back to work."

Doubt flashed in Rody's eyes.

"Now."

A palm wrapped around Vincent's flesh and he growled. *Yes, yes, that was it.* That was what he meant. Rody's big hands really felt different from his own. He could feel all the bumps on the calloused palm from the hard work, rubbing Vincent. Nothing like his smooth hands. If the redhead seemed insecure at first, he seemed to gain confidence when he saw the pleasure on Vincent's face. His fist rubbed Vincent. The saliva and his pre-cum made everything slippery. Each stroke was abrupt, fast. Vincent loved the way Rody's hand squeezed his shaft, holding it tight. Not hard enough to be uncomfortable, but enough to put enough pressure on

him. He whimpered, his face almost red. Rody's eyes seemed fascinated as he watched him, his grip focused.

Vincent had never seen him like that, not even when they were cooking together - or rather, when Rody was watching him. He could not read the unfamiliar glow in the two emerald jewels fixed on his face. It confused him, and an unspeakable feeling blossomed in his chest. For the first time, Rody was unreadable.

"Put it in your mouth," Vincent hissed.

Rody didn't wait, his lips wrapped around Vincent's cockhead to suck on it, making the dark-haired man shake violently against the bench seat.

"That's it Rody, hmm," Vincent grunted. "Show me what you've learned."

What his mouth couldn't take - not much - Rody wrapped his palm around the rest. Eyes closed, he licked under the head with his tongue, then sucked, trying awkwardly to get a coordinated rhythm. Frankly, Rody wasn't very good at it. But that made him even more endearing to Vincent. Above hot.

Vincent couldn't stop the heat from boiling in his stomach. His hand rested calmly on Rody's head. From where he was sitting, Vincent noticed the bulge distorting the young man's pants.

"You're really bad at this."

He pulled Rody's hair back again. He really liked doing that. Even better to see the eyebrows twitching in pain and the faint trickle of drool on his lower lip connecting with the tip of Vincent's cock.

"Rody, I almost forgot you."

Vincent's foot crushed the bulge between Rody's legs. The redhead moaned as Vincent's heel rubbed painfully against the erection.

"Vince, oh, it's... I'm going to..." Rody hiccupped and watched in horror as the foot massaged him. Rody's entire cock was stiffening beyond his grasp.

"What a pervert," Vincent scoffed - the red in Rody's cheeks darkened. His hand gripped his own cock as he admired Rody's struggle.

"No, no, I'm not, ahh," but he rubbed himself at the same time Vincent stepped on his fabric-covered cock. Rody's hips jerked, he shook increasingly. Vincent was so turned on by the sight. His fist on his cock sped up, his foot pressed harder, causing a suffocated whine from Rody.

"Not-not like that, no, mnh," Rody cried, humiliation crackling on the tips of his ears. Just a few rubs against Vincent's foot had the redhead's body convulsing and a blissful expression washed over his face, leaving him mouth agape and choking on his moan. The grip on Rody's root tightened and before Vincent could see it coming, a flash of white crossed his vision as he closed his eyes. Vincent groaned, strings of white landing on Rody's face, hitting his

cheeks, his nose, even sticking to his eyelashes, running down his chin until it stained his sweater.

Vincent took a deep breath and released Rody at once, too overcome by the force of his orgasm. His body relaxed on the bench. *Fucking hell* .

What the fuck was that? Sometimes Vincent couldn't understand what was happening to him. Or rather, he did and it terrified him. He'd just had to see Rody so happy and then his desire to devour his happiness had come back. He really was the worst.

Then he felt Rody's head land on his thigh. The young man was trembling, silent. Vincent thought of the state of his own trousers now, surely soiled with his own semen - thanks, Rody. The inside of Rody's underwear was completely ruined given the wet stain on the front of his trousers. They were disgusting.

But Vincent couldn't find the will to care. The shower would have to wait. His clean hand ran through Rody's hair.

What a good pet. Vincent was so despicable.

*

It was going to be a pretty stressful day, considering it was two days before Christmas. Vincent wouldn't return to the countryside to visit his parents this year; he would send them postcards. He was already busy. With someone else. Or, more likely, with others that very day.

Vincent had sent out some invitations a few days ago. The confirmations had arrived this morning. Fortunately, his apartment seemed to be in good shape again - almost as if there hadn't been an attempted murder. He'd replaced his old sofa with another one, flashier, redder, and just as comfortable.

Vincent didn't particularly like the festive season; people usually celebrated with family or friends. People's company wasn't what Vincent was looking for, but as long as it was useful to him, he was never against it. Life was about building relationships, and he was always thinking about the future. What could be better than inviting those who worked in a journalist's agency, interior design, gastronomy and cooking? Vincent wouldn't overdo it.

Wild parties weren't his thing. Small parties were enough. That way he could keep an eye on Rody.

But now it was time to cook.

"What... are you doing, Vince?" Rody's sleepy voice reached him in the kitchen.

"Goose. Specifically, goose ballotine with foie gras and hazelnuts with cranberry chutney." Vincent twisted the knife in his hand, then turned to Rody. "Do me a favor. Clean up the house and decorate the living room with the items in the box at the entrance. "

Rody nodded, dragging his feet as he left the kitchen. Vincent continued to cook, leaving the pans and oven on full blast. The appetizers would be ready by tonight. He'd make more throughout the day, many different ones to please some of his guests. After an hour, Vincent took off his apron and let everything simmer. He set the timer.

On his way into the living room, he was pleased to see the pine garlands decorating the red walls, contrasting with the paint. On the glass coffee table lay a small bouquet of red berries in a finely carved vase. Next to it, a crystal bowl held a few clusters of extinguished flake-shaped light bulbs. On the windowsill sat a small, unlit wreath. Sober as it was, it wouldn't give Vincent a terrible headache to look at his home decor. It was enough pain to look at the green branches.

In the middle of the living room, Rody stood there, his back facing Vincent, nosing through the box. Vincent looked up and saw what was missing.

"Where's the mistletoe?" Vincent asked. It would be best to put it up before the end of the year, but he didn't care about tradition.

"Mistletoe? What's that?" Rody faced him. Vincent turned pale when he realized what the redhead was chewing and the branches in his hands.

He was at a loss for words.

"Vince?"

Vincent sighed. He had to let it go. This kind of crap from Rody shouldn't surprise him. He just hoped the redhead wouldn't poison himself like that one day. Besides, Rody had just eaten his perfect excuse for a rapprochement between them. Ah, how the boy loved to complicate things for Vincent. This was his punishment for being so foolish, so stupid. The romance was gone, consumed by Rody.

"Forget it. As you may have guessed, we won't be alone tonight."

"People are coming?"

"Exactly. So I need a waiter."

"Will he be there tonight?"

Vincent smirked. "Why should I pay for one when I already have one at home?"

"Who is?" Rody noticed Vincent's stare. "Me?" He pointed at himself, sounding surprised.

"Yes. I bet you've done a lot of jobs like this before, haven't you?" Vincent's hand patted Rody's shoulder. "I'm counting on you. It's a very easy task."

"Y-yes, Vince."

Well, everything should be done by tonight. Vincent was about to turn on his heel and head back to the kitchen when Rody's hesitant voice stopped him.

"Does that mean I'm going to... meet your parents? Your siblings?"

The redhead suddenly looked stressed by the way he was fidgeting with his fingers.

"No. They're just friends who are coming over to enjoy a meal before Christmas," Vincent replied. Another exhausting night ahead.

"Your friends?" Rody sounded genuinely astonished. Really, Rody didn't know how to disguise himself. Vincent couldn't find the strength to care.

"Did you really think I didn't have any?" In reality, they were more connections than friends. That was the way the world worked.

"I mean..." Rody fumbled for words. Vincent rolled his eyes. "I thought we were... it's just that..." The redhead looked disappointed, ran his hand through his hair before finally saying nothing, looking at Vincent as if he expected him to guess. The fact that Rody was so caught up in his words should have alerted him, but Vincent's attention was elsewhere.

"You may or may not use your words. Otherwise don't waste my time, Rody. Keep the place tidy and look decent tonight, I bought you clothes for a reason. I'll be in the kitchen all day, so don't bother me."

Then he left the room, leaving a jaded Rody standing in the middle of the living room. The timer had just rung.

*

"My compliments to the chef for this heavenly dish!"

"It's incredible Vincent, the textures, the flavors. A great chef to be."

"Chef Charbonneau...excellent, my compliments."

Vincent sipped his champagne and forced a smile at the praise. Thank God there were less than a dozen of them. It was enough work to cook for all of them in one day, taking allergens into account. The night went quite well, with quiet conversation in his living room and his guests eating in silence, according to proper manners. It reminded Vincent that Rody could be quite noisy when he chewed food or made utensils squeak on porcelain. Vincent had never corrected him on his table manners. He liked how unpolished Rody was.

"Why is he here?"

For the occasion, he'd even invited Louis, his classmate - the most talented after him, the one with a real sense of elegance in the kitchen. The blond had spent most of the night lounging on the sofa before getting up to talk to Vincent in the corner of the room.

Vincent followed Louis' gaze to find out who he was talking about. Obviously. Rody rushed into the living room with a tray in his hand as he served the guests.

"Why not?"

"It's not like you to invite people like him. I thought he had disappeared before he brought disgrace to our prestigious school."

"As you can see, he hasn't."

Vincent drank his glass while continuing to stare at Rody. This time he seemed to be having a longer conversation with one of the guests instead of just serving the food. What was his name again? Was it Richard? Yes, the journalist from the agency. Why was their conversation so long? Vincent wanted to listen instead of Louis.

"This guy won't get anywhere in his life. It's really sad. You let him come here out of pity, how big-hearted you are," Louis let out this barely contained mockery. Vincent ignored him, deep in thought. He found that the white shirt and dark clip-on pants he'd chosen for Rody suited him perfectly. Even his hair wasn't as messy tonight. Even the most rebellious hair would be tamed with a little polish.

"He's so weird, asking me about you all the time. He freaks me out." Louis' words caught Vincent's attention.

"What do you mean?"

In the distance, Rody looked more and more uncomfortable in front of Richard. He fidgeted on his legs.

"At school he asked me about your schedule, what you were doing. He probably wanted your advice, he's such a nuisance in the kitchen and frankly I didn't want to deal with a charity case like him." Louis sighed and looked at the redhead with disdain. "Then I knew he was being extra creepy when I caught him spying on you in the kitchen instead of going to class, as if he couldn't get any worse."

Rody...had been spying on him? The discovery left Vincent speechless. What the hell was going on? What was the point? He'd never noticed anything before. Usually Vincent didn't take his eyes off his concoction in the kitchen for long.

"Why are you telling me this now? It's almost the end of the year." He turned to Louis. The blond shrugged.

"I knew he wouldn't last long at school. And I was right. I didn't think I'd find him at your place." Still. "But you two seem to be getting along. Well, I'll tell you, be careful."

Be careful? Why? He didn't need to. After all, Vincent had almost killed Rody, not the other way around. As the days went by, he couldn't even see what he had to be afraid of anymore. Rody was literally living off of him, so broke that Vincent filled his needs instead.

"Guys, I think we could light the candles at Marla's for New Year's Eve? It's very spiritual and brings good luck, she told me!" The bespectacled guy in the fur called out, Terrence, Marla's decorator friend, he worked in fashion. He believed passionately in Vincent's future.

"Good idea," Louis agreed. "There are a lot of finds we can snag before New Year's Eve. The streets are beautiful, near the Seine."

"Aren't they?" Marla sighed, still looking bored on the bench. "Could you come with us, Vincent? Or shall I light a candle for you?"

"The second option is preferable."

Vincent noticed that Rody was not in the room. The redhead's absence disturbed him to the core, but he didn't let it show. He smiled at his guests again.

"Too bad the great Charbonneau can't come!" Terrence cried dramatically. Richard, standing next to him, laughed as he pushed him toward the exit.

"We'll see you again Vincent, book us a table at your new restaurant next year!"

"It'll end up in the Michelin, that's for sure. Thanks for the welcome, have a great Christmas," Louis added.

They all left the apartment except Marla, who looked at herself in the powder compact before getting up, not in a hurry. She went to put on her coat at the entrance and Vincent escorted her to the landing out of courtesy.

"I found your dishes very intriguing, they're different from before. I don't know what's gotten into you, but continue." Marla wasn't usually an expressive woman. But her sincerity was palpable. Vincent felt quite flattered.

"Thank you, it's my pleasure."

"I'm heading off to join these fools. See you next year, Vincent."

She gave him a final wave and Vincent watched her disappear down the stairs. He wasted no time in closing the door and racing down the hall. He searched the rooms until he saw his own bedroom door half open. Déjà vu hit Vincent as he opened the door.

Rody jumped and sat down on the bed next to the nightstand, looking up at Vincent.

"What are you doing in my room?" He shut the door behind him.

Rody still preferred to sleep in the guest room, despite their first passionate night together - as Vincent liked to remember. Vincent didn't mind as long as Rody stayed in the house.

"I needed some time alone, sorry. I'll be right back."

"No need, they're all gone."

Vincent came to sit next to him. Rody seemed to be in deep thought.

"They all seemed to be doing well in their lives, to know where they were going." Rody let out a bitter laugh. "Hell! I even ran into Richard. Did you know we went through our first year of college together? To think he's already graduated, all he did was brag about his new job."

That explained why they were talking so much.

"The truth is, I... really am a failure. My mother was right."

Ah, mommy issues.

"Rody, listen. You're not that stupid, I'm sure you can solve anything if you put your mind to it for more than five seconds."

Vincent wasn't very good at reassuring people, especially not Rody. He didn't even know if that was his role, because if Vincent was honest, objectively speaking, he was terrible. He couldn't understand how Rody could find comfort in the words of such a gloomy person. But the redhead gave him a faint smile that warmed Vincent all over. Rody looked so good in the window light, his eyes sparkling, his mouth pink and part of his hair slicked back. He smelled good too. That perfume again. It seemed as if Rody was doing it on purpose.

They were close. Vincent just wanted...

He raised his hand. He saw Rody shudder with fear, his eyes more alert this time as he looked at his palm. That stopped Vincent dead in his tracks.

Well then. He lowered his hand. It had been a long time since he'd smoked, now that he thought about it, he'd done it less since Rody had been around. But right now he really needed a fucking cigarette. He tried to move to get it, but fingers grabbed his, pulling Vincent out of his own thoughts.

"I... I can be useful," Rody lowered his head. Rody's grip tightened. "Please."

What had become of him because of Vincent? Strange how Rody longed for his touch and feared it at the same time.

"Rody."

Green eyes stared back at him.

"Show me."

Vincent waited. Rody stood motionless for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, his head moved towards the raven's. A shy kiss was placed on his lips. So short. It felt like a dream that never happened. Seeing Vincent's unresponsive posture, Rody unbuttoned his own shirt with shaking hands before he was stopped.

"No need anymore."

Vincent felt strangely alone in the situation. His hand stroked Rody's head.

"You did a good job tonight. Get some rest."

He wanted to have a smoke and then clean up the house. It was the best way to end the night.

He got up, ready to go out. He stopped at the door. Rody was calling.

"Vince...I'm...I'm sorry. I wish I could be better."

Vincent gave him another quick glance.

Rody wasn't the problem, but he was clearly forcing himself . Vincent left without a word.

*

Vincent had given Rody a watch on Christmas Day, the fancy, flashy kind. Rody had tried to bake, but Vincent had stopped him before he could burn down his apartment. And if the redhead had been happy with his gift at first, he'd realize its usefulness sooner or later. But for now, as long as they enjoyed the carefree leftovers, everything would be fine. The next year came quickly. Like every year. After a while, Vincent didn't even notice. The transition to the next year was a formality for him. Not for Rody.

He had insisted on seeing the fireworks and had promised Vincent that he knew a place where there were no people. A lot of people went out for the event, especially if they were closer to the city center.

Rody hadn't lied. His place was really good. It was rustic, it represented him well. Vincent hadn't complained when he had to climb onto a tin roof. Some were easy to reach. They had watched, or rather Rody had watched. Vincent had been too busy observing the sparks of light in his eyes.

It might have been romantic, but the reality was much darker. They both knew it, but the silence between them had been heavy until Rody broke it with a sentence.

"I made a wish at midnight. I hope it comes true."

Vincent didn't believe in wishes, so he just mocked him. It was funny that at Rody's age he still clung to his childish ideas. Sometimes he liked to follow his foolishness.

Vincent's wish was to fill the void that was growing inside of him.

Nothing was better for that than to plunge back into exhausting work. Especially when everything was under control and Rody was manageable. This had been Vincent's new resolution at the beginning of the year, especially at Paul la Pierre.

One day, a week after school had resumed, he collected the fruits of his labor. Summoned to Limousin's office, standing up, Vincent didn't dare sit down; he was more worried than anything else.

"Your training at Paul la Pierre is over," Chef Limousin told him.

"Why, Chief?"

So soon. The chef stood in front of the window with his back to him. Then he turned to face him.

"I have nothing more to teach you, Charbonneau," Limousin began. "You are one of the most gifted students, if not the most gifted, I have seen in my career. Your creations are innovative, moving. The emotions grab us by the throat as soon as they touch our tongues."

His hand came to rest on a roll of paper tied in a knot. Astonishment gripped Vincent.

"Cooking is a matter of perfectly matching tastes, but it is also a matter of how we feel. I'm aware of your situation, and it impresses me even more. What you've been able to pass on so far is unique, and it would be a shame to leave you with us when you can fly on your own."

The chef approached him and handed him the scroll.

"You will have a place on my menu, and you have my encouragement for your future career. A bright future awaits you."

It was everything Vincent had hoped for. Everything he'd been waiting for since his first year at this establishment was in Limousin's grasp. With a firm grip, Vincent took it.

"Chef Limousin, this is a real honor for me." But he didn't feel that accomplished. It was terrible. "Your teachings over the years have given me so much, sir."

Limousin smiled. Far from the sourness Vincent knew him for.

"Spare me your words. You know that. The money for your restaurant will be useful, won't it?"

Vincent's eyes widened in surprise.

"Of course, such a determined student can't just end up as a commis de cuisine, even in the most prestigious restaurants."

"Chef... You really believe in me."

It was extremely flattering that a chef as excellent as Limousin could recognize him.

"How could I not? You could turn a rat into an hors d'oeuvre."

Vincent smiled slightly. There was no doubt in his mind. But to cook a rat was rather disgusting, unless Rody enjoyed it.

"Now that I don't have to see you again with your fellow dunces. I'll follow your progress from afar. Talent like yours shouldn't go to waste."

It was a very good ending for Vincent. He bowed his head in gratitude.

"Thank you, Chef. You'll always have a seat at my table."

He hugged the certificate tightly to his chest.

*

Rest was out of the question for Vincent. Work on his restaurant had to begin. To open a new restaurant required paperwork, contacting the bank with a helping hand from Limousin, and also renovation costs. If the first part was tedious but quick, the renovation was the most time-consuming. His restaurant needed some restoration. Vincent had contacted a specialist whose work he had seen in various reviews. Vincent would take only the best. Madame Elise Courbier.

"So we put this, here, here and here." A dark-haired, pale woman in a suit and heels stood in the middle of the main room. She ordered a dozen men to put down the wallpaper, along with the necessary decorations. It was an unusual sight, even for Vincent. He wasn't used to working with women in his life, much less with women in charge. Honestly, it was impressive in their day.

"Vincent, let me know if you want us to add more panels." Notebook between her fingers, she spoke to him as she took notes. They both looked at the men working.

"The place should be kept as sober as possible, but distinguished. Excessive fuss doesn't meet my standards." The beginning of Vincent's dream was coming to life under his eyes. No, he was fully awake. Reality was happening in front of him. Thanks to his hard work.

"Taste is not what you lack. This red is tantalizing."

Vincent gave her a charming smile. It was so ironic.

"Without your services, I doubt I would ever find harmony, Elise."

She chuckled. As they talked, Vincent continued to share his ideas about the decor. He wanted to see all the changes up close. His restaurant had to reflect his achievements. From floor to ceiling. He would hang beautiful lights, and the wood would be so polished that he would be able to see his reflection in it.

"The crimson curtains will be here in a few days, I've ordered them. The window frames can be carved to your liking. The oak is adjustable."

"I'd like the same for the counter at the entrance to the restaurant."

"And the bordeau!"

Vincent found her sensible, stylish in her tastes, and that reassured him. All this work would take time, but he hoped to have it all done by the middle of the year. Summer also seemed like a good time to open his restaurant. As he watched the workers hammering new planks into the wall, Vincent's gaze wandered during his discussion with her. Through the porthole in the kitchen door, he caught a glimpse of red-haired locks.

What was he doing here?

"'Pardon me, I'll be right back, I have some urgent matters to attend to."

"Take your time, we'll be here all evening."

Then he went to push open the doors of what would become his new kitchen. There was no one there.

Had Vincent been dreaming? Certainly not. He noticed the half-open door to his office and opened it. Really, Rody had this habit of getting busted.

"What are you doing here? I told you to stay upstairs and wait for me, Rody." It was an obvious unspoken rule that Rody should never go out without him.

The redhead was standing next to the trash can behind the desk. It was one of the few fully furnished rooms, along with the freezer. He stared at Vincent far too long for it to be normal. Rody tended to do that these days when Vincent came home instead of talking to him. Vincent rarely forced the conversation. Too many unsaid things hung in the air, choking his mind.

"Sorry... I wanted to see what was going on, it's a bit lonely up there."

So Rody had missed him? Vincent's irritation melted away. Still, he rolled his eyes to show his annoyance.

"Who is she? You were smiling a lot." Rody asked suddenly. He clenched his fist and surprised Vincent with the accusing tone.

"Obviously she is working. She's a wonderful interior decorator. If you have good manners as a man, you have to be charming to the ladies." Vincent couldn't see where the conversation was going.

"You seem to spend a lot of time down there."

"Because I'm busy. I've got a future to prepare for," Vincent replied harshly. Rody had to understand that it was for them as well. Rody pinched his lip.

"Of course, compared to me..."

"About that," Vincent walked over to his desk. He pulled the box from under the desk, wrapped it carefully, and placed it in Rody's arms. "Put this on."

"What's this?" Rody blinked several times in surprise.

"You'll find out, I think you'll like it. Hurry up. Upstairs."

Vincent didn't want him naked in the middle of the room or in the kitchen, where they might get caught. Rody went out. Vincent waited and leaned back in his seat. He turned to look at the well framed Limousin certificate on the wall. The start of his success and that of many others. His life wasn't so screwed up after all. It could go well.

A few minutes later, Rody's head poked through the office door.

"You can come in," Vincent said.

He walked in, a slight blush on his face. Vincent admired his gift. A white button-down shirt with Rody's sleeves rolled up, the dark vest, the pants that fit his legs perfectly, his shoes well polished. Vincent had chosen well; Rody would have looked more elegant if he had combed his hair and tied his tie properly. In Vincent's eyes, he was a piece of meat thrown into the lion's cage.

He cleared his throat, too disturbed to speak right away. It was a simple outfit. Nothing to get worked up about. He had to calm down. The vileness of his own behavior was haunting Vincent.

"Not bad."

His fingers tapped on the desk while his eyes roamed over Rody's curves. The young man stood straight and tensed in the middle of the desk.

"Thanks Vince...but why?"

"Congratulations, you have a new job."

It took a while for Rody's features to light up.

"What? Really?" He looked revived. "As a chef?"

Vincent laughed.

"No, of course not. You are terrible at cooking, but your performance before Christmas Eve was great."

Rody's collarbones were distracting. No, he really should button up that shirt before he...

"You'll make an excellent waiter, especially for my debut, it'll do for now," Vincent added to distract himself.

Rody's face crumbled.

"But... but I helped you. Together... I mean... it was the first time in my life that I achieved something."

Was he in a position to ask for something? Vincent rose from his seat and approached the redhead.

"It's true that you've made some progress, but not enough. Be a good student and accept your situation."

"But-"

A cold look from Vincent made him swallow his next words.

"I'm sorry, Vince. I'm really lucky," Rody said as he lowered his head. He'd given up. Good.

"Yes, very lucky. I'm not that patient with everyone."

That was a good deal.

"Well, if you're done bothering me, I have to work. You'd better go back to the house."

Panic grew in Rody's eyes. He suddenly clung to Vincent's arm, startling him.

"W-why? I want to stay here with you."

What the hell was that? The simple contact sent beams of electricity through Vincent's body.

"Stop acting like a child. It's exhausting." He wrenched his arm from Rody's grip, disgusted with his own reaction. "Go upstairs. Now!"

Rody pursed his lips, his eyes burning. Vincent had no idea what that meant, but it wouldn't be flattering. Instead, Rody turned his back on him. The door slammed shut.

Vincent sighed.

Rody was rather... odd.

*

It was a pity that they spent so much less time together because of the building of his new restaurant. Vincent had less time to keep an eye on Rody. Since he had less time, he became increasingly paranoid. Especially since Rody had become quiet. He used to talk so much. But at least he always stayed close to Vincent when he was around.

Not having that constant view of the other young man drove Vincent crazy. Sometimes he found himself staring at the white pills on his nightstand for too long.

He'd gotten over that. He and Rody could have... a good relationship. That was what he wanted. But how could they? Vincent was afraid to touch him, just as Rody was afraid to be touched. No doubt his paranoia was misplaced. But he liked to test reality, to confirm it until he was certain.

Today was a rest day. Rody sipped his tea in front of him on this beautiful rainy afternoon. The heavy raindrops fell on his kitchen window. The weather had been terrible the last few days. Like Vincent's mood.

"Rody," he called. "Go and get me the ingredients from La Truffe Noire's shop. It's two blocks from here."

He left the list on the table, along with a cash envelope containing more than just the essentials for spices and a key. He went back to reading his newspaper. The news was as grim as ever. The list of missing people.

Holding his cup, Rody looked out the window.

"It's raining."

"So?" Vincent turned the page. "Umbrellas are at the entrance. Get there before it gets worse."

Rody nodded, then grabbed everything from the table.

"Hm... I'm going alone? You don't want to come with me?"

Why did he seem so anxious? It was almost as irritating as it was heartwarming.

"Do you need my help with everything? How else can you be useful?"

That seemed to convince Rody and he stood up, looking much more determined.

"I... I'll be right back." He left the room. Vincent had to wait two minutes before he heard the front door slam. He looked at the clock. A thunderous dread grew inside him, making him more and more uncomfortable. He didn't even know why he was so worried in Rody's absence. It seemed ridiculous, even to himself.

After all, this test wasn't just about Rody, it was about Vincent himself.

He tried to read his journal, then turned pale when he read the name "Manon Vaucher" on the list. With the Christmas holidays approaching, everything about her had been muted by the festivities, but now, at the beginning of the New Year, it was all coming out.

Vincent felt disgusted. He threw the paper away. Why did he feel so sick all of a sudden? He got up and walked around. He went into the corridor. His hand pushed open the door to Rody's room to ease his mind. He was pleased to see that the room was neat and organized. Everything seemed to be in its place.

How pathetic that Vincent's only comfort could be found in this room when Rody wasn't there. Going inside, Vincent was able to rediscover the place.

This time, the noticeable difference on Rody's shelves was that the cook's plush toy was facing him. Not hidden. Vincent smiled.

He saw the books on the nightstand. He wondered when Rody found the time to read a book. Before bed? Vincent had never seen him do that, but he liked to imagine it.

His fingers brushed over the surface. Vincent was surprised to see "Notre Dame de Paris". As he reached for the book, piles of leaves fell to the floor. He picked them up, wanting to put everything back in its place, but his eyes fell on a first name at the beginning of each letter. *Manon*.

His fingers tightened on the paper as he read, crumpling it. His eyes opened in shock.

"Manon, I miss you so much. I'm still praying to see you again. I've found a new job. My situation is more stable now, but I still think about you. I wish we could be together again..." The word died in Vincent's throat. *Together*. He looked at more letters.

"I love you." It came up again and again. Rody... had never said that to him. That was what he was missing. *Love*.

Damn it. Vincent suffocated when his heart was so suddenly pierced. He had to lean against the wall to keep from falling over. Damn. Damn. Damn.

The pain was so intense. Rody was taking him through all kinds of stormy emotions. It was as if he'd just killed Vincent without lifting a finger. Dejection could only bring Vincent down. He felt even more nauseous than before. He put his hand to his mouth.

This was too much. Unbearable even for him. What he was building for himself and Rody was fucking useless.

"Vince, sorry, I had to come back, some guy got my clothes wet with his bike, people don't pay attention these days," Rody's voice made him turn his head towards the bedroom entrance. Vincent stared at him, speechless. Anger began to pound in his temples, fury rising at the mere sight of this redhead.

Rody realized what he was holding in his hand. He faded and looked at Vincent. Without waiting, Vincent's fingers tore the letters apart in front of Rody's wide-eyed gaze. Rody rushed towards him.

"Hey, what are you doing?!" Panic crept into his voice.

Vincent said nothing.

"Vince-" Rody's hand reached for his arm. Vincent couldn't help it; in one swift movement, his palm closed and he struck Rody in the face. Vincent heard his knuckles crack. The redhead stepped back and grabbed his face, face down.Blood dripped from his nose between his fingers.

Rody's irises quivered with terror as he stared at him.

Had Vincent hit him that hard? He couldn't even remember.

"You're pathetic, Rody. I understand why she left you," Vincent said, venom rolling off his tongue. "You can't even tell that your girlfriend is missing. Your letters are useless, they mean nothing."

An abrupt gasp came from the redhead.

"Manon? Missing?"

Vincent chuckled bitterly. The surprise on Rody's face was funny, painful. He'd isolated him so much that he was out of touch with the real world.

"Exactly. Learn to read the news next time instead of wasting my sheets, from my house, with my fucking ink to write your bullshit!" Vincent shouted. His chest swelled with anger. He had taken a step forward. Rody stepped back. Frankly, Vincent was afraid of what he would do if he caught Rody. Only this guy could make Vincent lose so much control.

"Calm- Calm down! Please! I... I don't like it when you yell at me," Rody trembled. He raised his hands in front of him to keep the distance between them. Blood trickled from his nose to his lips, dripping onto his shirt. Disgusting. "Please! I'm sorry! It's just that..."

"It's just that what?!"

Rody breathed heavily. He was wary of every move Vincent might make.

"I miss her and I felt sorry for almost forgetting her!" He confessed. Vincent froze. "I want her to be a part of my memory because it felt normal! But you manage to be there in my mind and it's unbearable! I don't know what you've turned me into... I feel infected since I met you. I realize now that I hate it...I really hate it, Vince".

Rody's confession ended in a cry. The silence was heavy. Since that night, Rody had never been so honest.

"Did you know her, Vince?" He asked, still sobbing. "That book... I saw her signature on one of the pages."

Vincent grew increasingly whiter at the question. He didn't want to answer. He'd never had time to notice the signature Rody was talking about.

"'Go'," Vincent whispered.

"...What? Vince?"

It was the only solution. Because he loved Rody, more than he was willing to admit, and if he stayed, Vincent would turn into a beast that he would never be able to look at in the mirror again. He would tear Rody apart.

"'Leave before I fucking kill you!" He snarled, a dark stare that made the redhead jump.

Rody stepped back once, twice. Then he ran away. Vincent's heart sank.

*

Rody had not returned that night. Vincent had hoped he would. At least that was the case for the first week. It was Vincent's fault, he'd caused it. In the end, Vincent should have killed him when he had the chance. Then he would have known exactly where Rody was, what he was doing, once he'd turned into a dead body. He even had the crazy urge to taste Rody in a dish he'd cooked himself, just like Manon. How would it taste? Rody was so sour, Vincent remembered.

How depressing nostalgia could be.

But Vincent always kept up appearances. His restaurant mattered; he wasn't going to give it all up. His personal life would not get in the way. With Madame Courbier's help, the progress on the interior came more and more to life. He had supervised and adjusted certain installations himself with the workers. The building of the restaurant had become his new obsession. So much so that he spent his nights sitting around a table with Madame Courbier, discussing the next steps to be taken.

They talked. A lot.

Since it was a useful relationship, Vincent knew it was important to nurture it. Besides, he hadn't had anyone to cook for since Rody left, and she was happy to try a Charbonneau appetizer. Once she'd eaten, she worked more dynamically and efficiently. As time went on, he got closer to his goal for the restaurant.

But his grief made Vincent do funny things, like drink more than he should on certain nights. In his office. In his living room. Then he smoked a lot more, as if he wanted to die faster. He had become a real compulsive smoker. The smell of a cigarette could make his mouth water. He slept less, with dark circles around his eyes.

Vincent ignored his feelings for a long time, as if they had never existed. He had better things to do, like contacting the suppliers who would supply his pantry, and then looking for cooks or waiters worthy of working among his staff. He was slowly settling in, knowing that he had already planned his next ten years. Some people were intrigued by the recent construction in the neighborhood, which was a good thing in itself. Charbonneau was an excellent name for a chef. It should rhyme with excellence, and it was already resonating in the Limousin magazine, and investments were flourishing.

Really, everything was going well.

So if Vincent had been so miserable for the last three weeks, it was because he was still a child, unable to get his life in order. He was bound to learn.

After another day spent working at the restaurant, the night was reserved for another event. Between coworkers.

"Your lamb is so tender, it melts in my mouth. I just love it! I'll even recommend it to Sir Henri-Duperrey! He's a busy man, but he'll always have time for an appetizer," Elise complimented, resting her cutlery on the plate.

Henri-Duperrey, that renowned writer whose quality works were hard to ignore. Vincent, standing beside her, was surprised. It was an interesting opportunity.

"As long as you keep coming, it's my pleasure, Elise."

"Certainly!" She smiled at him. "Well, I'm going outside for a smoke. I'll be back soon."

Vincent saw her get up and disappear into the restaurant hall. Vincent took that moment to clear the table. By the time she returned, Vincent would have finished cleaning up. He poured himself a glass of wine while he waited, then left it on the counter. When he returned to the main room after a few minutes, he noticed that she was taking a little longer than expected. They'd smoked together before. She should have finished by now.

Why was she taking so long? He waited and was relieved when she reappeared. However, she seemed more distressed now.

"I'm sorry, but I think I'll be going home a little early tonight," she said.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know, I just feel like I'm being watched? It's a little weird to say."

A woman out at that hour was pretty dangerous. Still, this wasn't a bad neighborhood; in fact, there was plenty of wealth in the area.

"Not at all. I'll take you home if you'd like," he offered.

"That's very kind of you. It's just that I ran to a phone booth and called my driver in a hurry, and he'll be here any minute. I won't bother you with your paperwork."

"You never bother me."

"So flattering!" She laughed. Her face looked much calmer.

Still, he walked her out of the restaurant. A beautiful, shiny black chauffeur-driven car flashed its headlights, and when Vincent was sure she was safely inside, they greeted each other.

"I hope to see you soon, my dear! Try not to think too much of me tonight!" She winked. The window rolled up and the car drove off.

Vincent was finally alone. He returned to his building and locked the front and back of the restaurant, as well as the windows. He took the opportunity to confine himself in his office with his bottle of wine and his glass. Sitting behind his oak desk, Vincent continued where he'd left off. There, the offers of potential employees from an agency he'd contacted.

As he drank, he examined each one. It was a way to pass the time, since he was so anxious up there. His apartment reminded him of Rody. The idiot hadn't come to get his things, so Vincent always saw some of his shoes in the hallway. Sometimes Vincent found himself staring at his bathtub, which Rody hated. Vincent's quirks always made Rody's blood run cold.

Here he was, still thinking about that stupid redhead. Well, guess what, Vincent will have to find a new waiter anyway. Rody had managed to get himself fired before he was hired here. How funny. He chuckled to himself at the thought of going too crazy over a man.

Because everything he'd offered Rody meant absolutely nothing. The redhead had destroyed it all with one letter. Blasé had been a part of Vincent's daily life for years. Rody had made it worse.

Love. What a shitty feeling. It burned worse than a cigarette.

As he continued to read, Vincent saw his vision blur. The letters danced in front of his eyes, the faces took on indistinguishable shapes. He put his glass back on the table. He grabbed his skull.

Maybe he'd drunk too much. Vincent didn't hold his liquor very well, which was exactly why he drank to feel afloat. But he'd never felt like this before. He reached for the bottle, but unintentionally pushed it and it fell to the floor, breaking in two.

"Shit..." he groaned.

His carpet was ruined now. He heard a strange sound, like someone scratching at his office door. He stood up, heat rising in his throat, tugging at the collar of his chef's jacket. Drops trickled down his forehead. His vision became increasingly black. He could no longer see where he was.

Too hot.

Vincent fell, his hand trying to hold on to the table but failing.

The world went black.

*

When Vincent awoke, the first thing he felt was the cold all around him. He shivered at first, unsettled by the change in temperature as his body tried to adjust to the heat burning inside him and the cold caressing his skin. The second thing Vincent noticed was the hardness of the ground he was lying on. The third thing startled him and made him open his eyes wide as he tried to move, but he couldn't. His arms were bound by ropes. Vincent was tied up. In his cold room.

"Ah, Vince! You woke up!" The cheerful voice made his head spin. Rody was standing in the doorway. "It was hard to find the perfect time to drug you, but I did it!"

"What the hell, Rody! Are you out of your fucking mind?!" Vincent shouted. He struggled harder against the ropes around his wrists and ankles. Damn, it was tight, impossible to escape.

"Take it easy. We're here to talk." The gleaming blade of the knife in Rody's grip frightened Vincent. What the hell was this? Was Rody serious? At the sight of Vincent's face, Rody laughed.

"You should see your face! Don't you just love it when the roles are reversed?"

Rody was completely insane. Vincent took a deep breath to calm down. He should have known better. He should have killed Rody.

"Rody, what do you want? Money?" Vincent saw him approach, fear growing inside him. He noticed that Rody was wearing the waiter's outfit as well as the locket he'd given him. So bizarre. Nothing made sense. Damn it, his ropes were too tight, his knuckles digging painfully into Vincent's lower back. He had to find a way.

Another laugh from Rody interrupted his train of thought.

"If only." Now Rody was close, crouching over him. "You abandoned me, Vince."

The blade grazed Vincent's cheek, under his eye, making him gulp. He was going to die.

"Why wasn't I enough for you? You're just like all the others," Rody muttered, his eyes shining with sadness.

That was what this was all about. Maybe Vincent could fix it. Rody's self-esteem problems were showing.

"You're enough Rody, I swear, otherwise I wouldn't have kept you." Vincent was sincere. Seeing the redhead's face light up, he thought he'd get away with it, but was disheartened to see the green eyes darken. Suddenly a pain shot through his shoulder. Vincent clenched his teeth as he saw the blood on his sleeve.

Oh.

The tip of Rody's blade was red.

"I'm not enough. Never enough."

Vincent tried not to panic. At least the cut wasn't deep. But holy shit, it was uncomfortable. Painful.

"You barely touched me, I thought you loved me," Rody continued.

Vincent couldn't understand what was going on with this guy who was so different from him. His sentence ignited an anger in him at this nerve, at this disillusionment Rody was sinking into.

"Can you hear yourself? The victim asking to be raped, is this some sick joke of yours? That is what it was, a rape. Pull yourself together, Rody. This isn't love."

It was the disgusting truth that Vincent had also tried to soften, but deep down he knew it. *Rape*. What an ugly word. Was this the beast that Rody wanted? This Rody who was so lost in his life? Vincent's love was repulsive, he'd shown it to him.

The redhead was silent, the knife dragged on the floor.

"Keep sending love letters to your girlfriend, one day she'll answer," Vincent taunted. He was confronted with silence, thick and suffocating. Vincent was aware of how out of breath he was.

"You think I don't know." Rody's hand wandered over his own necklace, then suddenly he opened the medallion. All of Vincent's blood seemed to leave his body, he was so livid that he shook. His mouth opened several times to say something, but nothing came out. It was a nightmare, wasn't it?

"You really knew her," Rody smiled.

Vincent was a dead man. It didn't matter what he did. Rody would take revenge. Why else would he show him the locket with Manon's face in it?

"You're so quiet. What did you do to her?"

Rody's eyes were filled with an insatiable hunger that frightened Vincent for the first time. Rody had almost made him forget that a dog could bite its owner.

"You really don't want to talk," Rody sulked. He stood on his legs and left the room. Vincent was frozen; he didn't have time to make an attempt to escape when Rody returned with a bottle in his hand. He stood over Vincent.

"You've got cooking oil, that'll do." Suddenly Rody's hands grabbed the waistband of his pants. Panic began to crackle inside Vincent at the thought of what was about to happen to him. *No, Rody wouldn't dare –*

"Wait! Stop!" Vincent screamed, eyes wide open, but Rody ignored him and tried to pull the pants down his legs, but they got stuck at his ankles because of the knot in the rope. That relieved Vincent. He didn't dare imagine how many rules of sanitation Rody had just violated.

"What do you mean stop? We just started," Rody asked curiously. Vincent was in no mood to deal with any of this. Surely this was some kind of sick game to drive him nuts and sink him in his own guilt. To drown him in his sins, to hang him with all his wrongdoings. What if that was what Rody wanted to hear? Vincent was even more worried when he saw Rody's hand on his thigh. Vincent felt so helpless, it was terrifying. He didn't know what would happen to him as the minutes passed.

"Rody, I'm so sorry for what I've done to you," he said, his voice breaking. Even for Vincent his words would never be enough, no amount of apologies could ever fix anything. Then Rody's hand cupped his crotch through his underwear, Vincent's limp erection twitching with

interest as he felt the palm. At that very moment, Vincent hated his body, always too weak in the face of this redhead.

"Sorry? For what? You showed me love. No one has ever... valued me so much, Vince. No one."

Because of him, Rody had gone completely insane. The pain in Vincent's shoulder reminded him of this morbid reality for which he alone was to blame.

"I want to show you how I can please you and what I've learned." Rody turned and got down on all fours. Vincent felt fingers tugging at his underwear. He could see nothing but Rody's butt trapped in his pants, right in front of his eyes. Vincent held his breath at the sight, his pupils roaming over Rody's form in spite of himself. Hell, he was no better than a dog.

He gritted his teeth as he felt the wetness on his cockhead.

"Rody, you don't have to do this -*argh* !" A growl came from Vincent as the wet heat sucked the tip. Rody's tongue ran the length of it, sending electricity through the rest of Vincent's body. Vincent gasped, the rumbles traveling from his cock to his balls.

His arousal grew as he melted into Rody's mouth, swallowing him whole. Vincent twisted against the floor, his wrists straining on the ropes, his eyes rolling back at the feel of that tight throat around his shaft. His cock pulsed deeply buried. He heard the wet sound between his legs, the choking sound Rody made as he sucked Vincent.

It was... it was beyond words. *Fuck* .

Vincent's hips shifted, his cock thrusting deeper into Rody's mouth and the throat convulsed. Vincent opened his mouth to suck the air into his lungs, everything felt so hot now. His whole body was turning into a blazing furnace.

Where the hell had Rody learned this? The way he moved his tongue, tightened his lips around Vincent's dick, was so fucking obscene. Vincent couldn't see that dirty mouth stretching around the girth of his cock, but it was impossible not to imagine it when he closed his eyes. He must be dreaming because there was no way Rody wouldn't kill him for Manon's disappearance. Maybe he was already dead and in heaven. God, Vincent would never want to live another day on earth if that was the case.

Rody slowly lifted his head, his tongue reaching the tip of Vincent's cock and plunging it into the slit. He collected all the pre cum that ran down Vincent's flesh, not wasting a drop.

Vincent heard himself moan like a poor man. He almost resented his body for reacting this way, for submitting to this oh so good treatment Rody was giving him.

"You taste so... bitter, so good," Rody commented dreamily. He swallowed him right away, as if he couldn't bear to be separated from Vincent's cock for a second. All his attention was focused on Vincent, taking every inch into his mouth. The tip of his nose touched his balls, Vincent gasped, the burn increasingly confined to his lower abdomen. Vincent's heavy bones pinned him to the floor rather than the weight of Rody now slumped over him.

Vincent's eyes began to lose focus and he lost the rhythm of his breathing as Rody sucked him down. It was endless. Opening one eye, Vincent saw the redhead's hard-on tugging at the fabric of his pants, close to Vincent's face, making him twitch on Rody's tongue. Rody savored him, sucking intently, ripping Vincent's soul through his flesh as he went. Vincent didn't know how long he stayed there, grunting against the floor. Hot waves spread to his pelvis, climbed to the tip of his cock and sank into Rody's throat. It was just too perverse, the way Rody swallowed him like he was a delicious treat.

Vincent moaned, his nails digging into the palms of his hands as the sensation in his balls tightened. He wanted relief, his body pushing him closer to the edge. His coherent thoughts faded with every dirty sound Rody's sucking made. It felt terrible to be confronted with his own helplessness. Rody was making him bitterly regret his actions. Maybe this man would kill him in the end. Vincent would die happy, at least after he had come in this mouth.

"Rody, I'm *going–mnh, ah* !" his moan broke off as he felt Rody suck him harder. The redhead's tongue licked and ruined everything else in Vincent's mind. The pain was gone. Pleasure was invasive, parasitic on every bit of skin hit by the cold air that burned on contact with his heat.

Shit, shit, shit. Vincent was too weak, Rody was too good. He was really going to come–

Then Rody stopped and frustration washed over Vincent. He was distraught as he felt the tickle on his cock subside.

Rody turned his head toward him, his cheeks flushed, drool dripping down his chin, red curls falling over his eyes.

"Not now, Vince." Then he kissed the tip of the cock lovingly, making Vincent's thighs tense. Rody wiped his face with his sleeve and stood up again. Vincent was aware of his erection, pointing humiliatingly at the ceiling. He tried to move back to sit up, but it was too much effort, he'd just have to stand there and wait. He heard the rustle of clothing. Rody was taking off his pants, kicking them with his legs and leaving his socks on.

"You know, I've only been able to get better for you thanks to that brothel woman, she taught me a lot of techniques," he said. This statement made Vincent frown. What had Rody been up to since he had left? It was more frightening than anything else. To be honest, Vincent didn't want to share.

"Of course I didn't betray you! Self-improvement is more valuable anyway," Rody giggled, and Vincent was almost afraid of himself as he realized his relief. The redhead pulled down his briefs. A hot, flushed flesh confronted Vincent. Apprehension grew in him, especially as he watched Rody take his precious olive oil – which made Vincent even more distraught over its use. The oil dripped onto Rody's thick fingers and the young man got back on top of Vincent, kneeling down. His oiled fingers went behind his back.

"Hey, you have to focus on me, Vince, I'm doing this for you," Rody said, his face close to Vincent's. Honestly, he didn't have to ask; Vincent couldn't look away. He admired Rody's tense features.

"Your fingers are better, they're longer," Rody gasped as he worked himself open. Rody's other hand was tensed on the floor. Green eyes gleamed, piercing Vincent's gaze.

"Rody, do you think it's necessary to do all this?" Vincent asked. Because he couldn't understand why Rody hadn't killed him yet.

"I want to be the best for you," Rody finished with a pathetic moan. The redhead's hips trembled, his erection growing further between his legs as he plunged his fingers deeper into him - how much had he put in? how far was he going? Vincent was so ashamed to ask himself that in his position. "I-I want you to be honest with me, even when we're together, you wear that mask a lot."

Rody stopped, breathless as he pulled his fingers out of his behind. He looked down at Vincent's glistening cock. Vincent took a deep breath and felt the other grab him. Oil dripped onto his hardness.

"I'll show you how good I am," Rody murmured. He positioned himself over him, his hole kissing the tip of Vincent's cock. Vincent thought he was going to hurt himself because he hadn't prepared himself enough, taking all his time to get Rody to open up to him the first time, but the redhead didn't care. In one swift move, Rody impaled himself on him. Vincent's mouth fell open, he felt feverish, the tight heat inflamed his whole brain. He didn't dare move, too overwhelmed by the crushing feeling of Rody's muscular thighs pressing down on him. Rody's body so strong, so absolutely devastating over Vincent.

"Oh, Vince, I, mnhm," Rody moaned, his shoulders shaking. His hands were clenched on the floor on either side of Vincent's head, leaning toward him. He looked depraved, his face wrecked. "Filling me so well, do you like being inside me?"

Vincent pinched his lower lip, refusing to answer Rody's stupid questions. He could barely breathe. Rody's scent covered all his senses. The redhead squeezed him so tightly that it hurt in a delicious way. Helpless, Vincent watched as his cock sank into Rody. Every inch was eaten up under Vincent's hungry eyes.

"Rody, you're so full of nonsense," he growled through clenched teeth. Rody didn't seem to hear him; he slammed his hips against his.

Vincent let out a heavy, animal growl from his throat. His face twisted, pleasure coursing through every vein. Rody rode him, moans dripping from his lips. Rody moved his hips, angling to find his sweet spot, as if Vincent was now just a toy to be broken. Every impact on his cock made Vincent's lungs gasp desperately for air. God, he couldn't get any more pathetic.

"So... so fucking good, Vince, *shit* ," Rody swore, mouth open, eyes trembling as he hit his sensitive spot. Vincent wished he hadn't been so immobilized. Here he was, lying there to take it. Rody's neck screamed for him to rip out all his vocal cords and chew on them. Vincent's fingernails dug into his palms, draining blood as he met the devastating shock that coursed through his insides. He felt like a starving, caged man. Rody should never have provoked this, he would make him pay.

"Rody, you couldn't keep it in your pants for a second. You had to do all that to fuck yourself on my cock," Vincent spat, so frustrated. His head was even more dizzy under Rody than it had been with the alcohol. He just felt so damn good.

"Y-yes, sorry, yes," Rody moaned, eyes closed tightly, head tilted back. Rody's hand went between his legs, Vincent saw him grab himself and quickly jerk his cock in a strangled moan. His knees buckled from rubbing against the tiles, red from the effort.

Vincent didn't understand their primal joining, what Rody wanted, but he knew one thing. He wanted to sink his teeth into Rody's heart, to feel the blood run down his throat. To consume him. He wanted to bathe in Rody's guts until he drowned, until Vincent couldn't see anymore because he was totally engulfed. Seeing Rody, sharing the same fucked up urge, made Vincent feel less sick, even less disgusting than the first time. Rody's rhythm was raw, brutal, direct. He took to take, his hand fucking hard into his fist until it hurt.

"Please, Vince, tell me, ahh, that you love me," he begged. He went faster, harder. He grinded his hips without trying to comfort Vincent. Rody's chest strained against his shirt, sweat dripping down his neck. Vincent's mind was rotting in his own lust, he felt the wet corners of his mouth salivating. Having Rody on a platter, every day, would never be enough.

"I...I love you," Vincent croaked in despair. The orgasm crept up on him like an inevitable fate. This was what Rody wanted, wasn't it?

"Ah, ah," Rody's moans went into his head, pounding his eardrums, worse than his heart racing to break free. Rody's body shuddered violently, and a second later he gasped as he spurted into his fist. His hole tightened so much around Vincent, Rody kept moving his hips, still driven by the devoted instinct to please him. Vincent's orgasm hit him so hard, rising to his stomach, that he let go, moaning the redhead's name. When he closed his eyes, he thought he saw the heavens take the form of Rody. Angels sang in his ears.

Later he noticed the heavy weight on him, crushing him. Rody took a deep breath, sweat dripping between his relaxed eyebrows, his forehead resting on the cold floor.

"I hope you understand now," Rody sighed after a while. He was so sticky. "I know you killed her, and because of that I felt bad for loving you, I wanted to die. But..."

Vincent's eyes widened at his words. Rody had actually just said that he loved him. The words caught in his throat.

"You love me so much Vince, let me be here for you."

They looked at each other, their breaths mingling. Vincent's heart was about to collapse from love, from too much love, it was so intrusive, so deliciously addictive. He just nodded. Seed-covered fingers went to Vincent's mouth, sliding gently between his lips.

"You love my taste," Rody smiled. Vincent sucked slowly, familiar with the tingling on his tongue.

He felt calmer but exhausted. Lips settled on his forehead to kiss it.

"If you tell me to leave again, I won't take it well," Rody said quietly.

Vincent knew he meant it. The arrow of love that Rody had planted in his heart was destined to never go away, Vincent felt like a doomed man, but he was strangely happy about it.

"And every day will mean every day, or at least often this time," Rody added.

Vincent hummed pitifully around the knuckles in his mouth to agree. He'd managed to find someone even crazier than himself.

Chapter End Notes

This is my last chapter. I hope you felt my tears and blood in this work. It almost made me want to make a Rody stalker AU.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!